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ABSTRACT

Prepared as part of a project aimed at redressing the neglect of American drama in college and secondary school programs of drama, American literature, and American studies, this booklet provides primary and secondary source materials to assist teachers and students in the study of George L. Aiken's dramatic adaptation of Harriet Beecher Stowe's "Uncle Tom's Cabin." Materials in the first part of the booklet deal with literary and theatrical considerations and discuss (1) the popular sentiments of the novel and play, (2) Tom as the black maternal Christ, (3) nineteenth century staging of the play, (4) the play as melodrama, (5) the play as drama, and (6) a variant version of the auction scene. Materials in the second section cover cultural, societal, and historical considerations and place the play in an historical perspective; provide a case against it; and offer a view of a similar play, "The Escape or a Leap for Freedom," by William Wells Brown. The third section contains selections from primary source materials, including critical commentary on the validity of the picture of slavery offered in the play and novel. Questions for study are included in the appendixes. (FL)

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SHOWCASING AMERICAN DRAMA:

GEORGE L. AIKEN / HARRIET B. STOWE

UNCLE TOM'S CABIN

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A HANDBOOK OF SOURCE MATERIALS

Vera Jiji, Editor

Produced by the Program for Culture at Play: Multimedia Studies in American Drama
Humanities Institute, Brooklyn College, Brooklyn, N.Y. 11210

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From the Preface to *The Key To Uncle Tom's Cabin*

In fictitious writing, it is possible to find refuge from the hard and the terrible, by inventing scenes and characters of a more pleasing nature. No such resource is open in a work of fact; and the subject of this work is one on which the truth, if told at all, must needs be very dreadful. There is no bright side to slavery, as such. Those scenes which are made bright by the generosity and kindness of masters and mistresses, would be brighter still if the element of slavery were withdrawn. . . . Slavery, therefore, is not the element which forms the picturesque and beautiful of Southern life. What is peculiar to slavery, and distinguishes it from free servitude, is evil, and only evil, and that continually.

Harriet Beecher Stowe

A SOURCEBOOK OF INTERDISCIPLINARY MATERIALS IN AMERICAN DRAMA:

George L. Aiken, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852)

Edited by Vera Jiji

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INTRODUCTION: To the Reader

Like any art form, the drama reflects, dissects and affects the culture of which it is a part. This is as true of plays performed in nineteenth century America as it is now. Yet, though most Americans know the point of view of *Death of a Salesman* or *A Streetcar Named Desire*, they would be unable to recall even the name, let alone the plot or characters, of our nineteenth century plays. Nevertheless, such plays flourished and were performed all over the nation, providing the audiences with mythic characters who shaped nineteenth century thought as extensively, perhaps, as Lucy Ricardo, the Fonz, Archie Bunker or Agent 007 have shaped our own. Moreover, although the works themselves may no longer be seen, the absorption of these characters into American thought has left traces which still affect our thought and behavior. Therefore, the purpose of this series is to showcase neglected dramas of significance from our past so that you may study them for what they are: not primarily revelations of eternal human qualities, but rather of Americans at a particular moment of historical importance not only to our ancestors but to ourselves as well.

The play chosen here is *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, arguably the most important play ever produced in the United States. Its popularity and longevity were so great that it can be credited, almost single-handedly with the birth of regional theatre in this country. In 1852, most Americans, including Harriet Beecher Stowe, thought the theatre immoral, so much so, that when Stowe's permission was sought for dramatization of the novel, she refused it, noting that "If the barrier which now keeps young people of Christian families from theatrical entertainments is once broken down . . . [these young people] will be open to all the temptations of those who are not such, as there will be . . . five bad plays to one good. . . . The world is not yet good enough for it to succeed."[1] Yet succeed it did, when George L. Aiken dramatized it without her permission, as our casebook articles testify. The phenomenal success of this "great and moral play" broke the barriers against theatrical patronage so completely that people flocked to see it not only in opera houses or museums or academies of music, but in town halls, tents, anywhere at all.

The articles written for this casebook help the reader to appreciate the play's significance. In "An Historical Perspective," Florence Polatnick considers the evidence for the validity of Lincoln's quip that Harriet Beecher Stowe started the Civil War. Granted that the effect of the play cannot be separated from that of the novel, the latter ceased to be a best seller within a few years of publication, whereas the play continued its record of performance, season after season, all over this country and abroad, for eighty years. By 1900, the number who had seen it equalled the population of the United States.[2] An army chaplain recorded that, after the Civil War, some Southerners who saw the play in New York left the theatre and "walked for some time in silence, until the South Carolinian, profoundly moved, burst forth, "Well, *that's* what licked us!"[3]

Another fateful effect the play had on our history was that it set the parameters for the way in which most white Americans saw their black fellow citizens. All our reprints of segments of earlier articles reflect various attempts to deal with the problem of setting down the horrors of slavery in a literary context without such severe distortion that the abolitionist cause was harmed more than helped. Thus Stowe in our epigraph and her description of Topsy tries to explain how and why she handled some of her problems as a writer of fiction as she did. Furnas and Baldwin excoriate her for her sentimentality. Kemble's *Journal* entries and Weld's reports by eye-witnesses (neither fictional forms) are included so that students can consider how these selections bear on the subject, how profound their effect is on the reader, and what that tells us about the art of propaganda. Josiah Henson's account of his religious conversion is set down so that students can compare it to Tom's behavior. Fiedler's questioning of Henson's account and Baldwin's discussion of the relationship between an event and the language in which it is recounted take us to the borders of current critical concerns with language as traducer and traitor in its role as recounter of experience.

If we feel ourselves lost in a quagmire, trying to understand what we read about race relations in a play written in 1852, the articles have been written to provide the necessary background information. Warshaver sets the work for us in the context of nineteenth century literary traditions, so that we may view the domestic themes and sentimental tone of novel and play in that context. Ammons places the work in relationship to the author's life, concerns and radical feminist philosophy. Loney describes the physical aspects of nineteenth century American theatres, so that we can understand better some of the distortions and transformations which the play suffered during its long life, while Gerould discusses the dramatic tradition of melodrama into which the play falls. Hill explores the changing response of the black community to this play which strongly affected the way in which most whites responded to them. Meanwhile, Perkins considers a play written in 1858 by an escaped slave, William Wells Brown, who had the benefit of intimate knowledge not only of masters and slaves other than himself, but who knew Stowe's play as well. We would have assumed that his play would give a more accurate, less stereotypical view of the subject than *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. That it does not again raises profound questions about the relationship between experience itself and the language we use when we try to put experience into some shape, like a play, in which to convey that experience to others.

Briefly touched on by Jiji are the changes which Aiken made to the novel in dramatizing it. A variant version of the auction scene illustrates the outrageous surgery performed on the work to appeal to popular taste. A few reviews show how radically the work can be transformed merely by passing through the mind of the reviewer who sees what he has brought into the theatre in his head, not what others may be seeing onstage at the same moment.

In a recent issue of the *Journal of the African Activist Association*, a black writer declares that "Each Black American today, in fact or in fiction, is an embodiment of the experiences of his predecessors. Each Bigger Thomas, each Cross Damon . . . is an amalgam of . . . Uncle Tom, Dred, Frederick Douglass, Garvey, King, Malcolm X and Frantz Fanon . . . and Uncle Tom, both mythically and historically, has been a cardinal point in this revolution of the black mind. Every Black man in America carries in him not only a bit of Bigger Thomas, but also a bit of Uncle Thomas. This is the fact and basis of his survival."[4] We not only agree with that assessment, but add that each white American also carries myths about Uncle Tom. Filtered through the confusions and misrepresentations of racial conflicts this country engenders, these need clarification and purging.

Thus our purpose in featuring this work: text, sourcebook and videotape, is to invite you to study it for yourselves. We think you'll find its messages and meanings far more interesting and complex than you expect.

THE POPULAR SENTIMENTS OF *UNCLE TOM'S CABIN*

by Gerald Warshaver

Why was *Uncle Tom's Cabin* so immensely popular? What were the motifs, themes, and rhetorical strategies which made the novel and the play so appealing? Focusing on the self-identity and values of Mrs. Stowe's public, I offer two areas of consideration. The first requires us to ponder what it was that Harriet Beecher Stowe ultimately proved when she wrote her story. Next, I suggest that the conservative basis of Mrs. Stowe's anti-slavery preachments, in large measure, accounts for her success.

A Work of National Scope

Critics who have recently begun to reevaluate the canon of the American Renaissance, the miraculous years of the early 1850s when a large number of truly American masterpieces were created, call our attention to the ways in which *Uncle Tom's Cabin* distinguishes itself from the classic works of Emerson, Hawthorne, Whitman, Melville and Thoreau. Ellen Moers, for example, notes that these male authors were self-absorbed, detached from social concerns, uncertain of their public, and concerned with symbolic rather than material realities. In contrast, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* won its vast public not only for its slavery matter, but also for "its priceless evocation of the national character and daily ways." In 1868, when John William DeForest, the inventor of the concept of "The Great American Novel," applied the term to *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, he was responding to the social and geographic "national breadth" of the story. Yankee spinster, Ohio Quaker farm wife, Southern lady, and mulatto mistress; slave owner, trader, and catcher; Northern money interests and mortgaged planters; raw-boned Kentuckians, black field hands and overseers, and a full complement of other high and low regional and racial social types are all encompassed within the plot of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.[1]

To a public for whom the political questions raised by slavery cast national identity into doubt, Mrs. Stowe offered reassurance on the most basic level. She demonstrated that a single intelligence could novelistically create a story out of the multiform complexities and antithetical economies and habits of American reality. *Uncle Tom's Cabin* testified to the centripetal force of creative imagination. It dramatically demonstrated that the narrative of American life still made sense. More subtly, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* implied that Americans were comparable to the members of a family who share a common history and culture. Although the separation of black families formed the major thrust of the story, the emotional and ideological alienation of white family members from each other receives repeated emphasis throughout. This familial disunity did not result from any natural antipathy; rather, like its unholy product, Topsy, slavery–which had just grown–divided the house that was America. Abolish it, promised Mrs. Stowe, and Americans would rediscover their "long-lost" relations.

A Christian Allegory

In addition to serving as a positive analogy for a public anxious about its national identity, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* acted as an antidote for those whose moral self-image the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 had undermined. White today's readers might be most likely to consider the expanded tale of travel which comprises the structure of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* comparable to a later candidate for the title of "The Great American Novel," *Huckleberry Finn*, Mrs. Stowe's contemporaries found her panoramic journey through mid-American similar in structure and intent to John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*. This comparison came readily to a public which had for generations used Bunyan's work as a staple of their religious instruction and family literary entertainment.[2]

In *Pilgrim's Progress*, Americans learned that the outcry against sin was the beginning of the pilgrimage to the Heavenly City and, simultaneously, the first evidence of the effectual workings of the grace which brought personal salvation.[3] Similarly, *Pilgrim's Progress* accustomed Mrs. Stowe's peers to respond to the structure of her story with an allegorical interpretation. In Bunyan's tale, as Leo Braudy so aptly characterizes its central message, "Bunyan's Christian must wend his way through the many lures of life in a very recognizable section of rural England, constantly alert to what lies beneath the individuals and places he sees and constantly attuned to the significance of their 'true' names in the spiritual order of the universe."[4] Though Mrs. Stowe changed the landscape and skin color of some of her Christians, her constant "lining out" or underscoring of the moral significance of the persons, places, and events in her story left no doubt in her audience's minds that her work was intended as a venture in Christian didacticism similar to its Puritan model.

An audience schooled in the conventions of Puritan spiritual autobiography had little difficulty interpreting the intentions of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. In the context of antebellum evangelical Christianity, this meant that Mrs. Stowe's public could take her work to heart as an outcry against sin. Furthermore, by sympathetically responding to her story, Americans could self-righteously feel saved from sin, converted, and on the road to salvation. For Northerners who felt that the Fugitive Slave Act implicated them in the damned and damning slave system, the feeling of moral progress *Uncle Tom's Cabin* gave them proved powerfully appealing.

A Social Message

Mrs. Stowe provided Americans with more than an application of Bunyan's message to their times. Her work successfully summed up the ways Victorian America had translated Bunyan's Calvinism into a social, rather than a religious system.[5] Where Bunyan had focused on self salvation, Mrs. Stowe focused on social salvation. Preaching a radical evangelical eschatology by warning the nation of the *Dies Irae* a just God had in store for a nation of unjust and cruel sinners, she promised the kingdom of heaven to the repentant and the just and merciful. She did this by cloaking the popular mainstays of ante-bellum American culture with the mantle of evangelical redemption and thrusting them onto the national stage as the comforting answer to the moral and political crisis occasioned by the slavery question. *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, then, reassured Americans that it was possible to change the social evils of slavery without disrupting the values of American culture.[6] Mrs. Stowe's story became what Ronald G. Walters has termed "the single most effective piece of antislavery propaganda" because it attacked slavery as a system which violated a principle which all Americans, North and South, acknowledged as fundamental and sacred, namely, the virtues of domesticity.[7] Equally significant, it called on its audience to mobilize the sentiments of feeling, affection, and emotion–faculties most closely associated with the home and family–to condemn slavery. This is illustrated again and again throughout the pages of the novel but nowhere as succinctly as in Chapter XII, "Select Incidents of Lawful Trade." Here Mrs. Stowe used bystanders watching a cargo of slaves going "downriver" as a type of Greek chorus to comment on the moral of the story. Employing an anonymous "lady" as her authorial alter ego, she drove home what she considered to be the most telling attack against the institution of slavery. "The most dreadful part of slavery, to my mind," says her commentator, "is its outrages on the feelings and affections–the separating of families, for example."

The Power of Domesticity as a Virtue

A generation which has matured during a time when the virtues of domesticity have undergone a profound devaluation can little imagine the sentiment which surrounded the concept of "home," "family," and "wife and mother." So sure was Mrs. Stowe of the power of this sentiment that she made the domestic side of Uncle Tom the central image of her story. She knew that in mid-19th century America appeals to the "rights of man" had much less force than sympathy for Uncle Tom's cabin. The manner in which *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was commercially marketed proved her correct. For example, the *New York Tribune* of 23 October 1852 announced that mother and father could buy what would become one of the period's most popular children's card games: an "Uncle Tom and Little Eva" game which concerned the separation and reunification of families.[8]

Students interested in gaining a primary understanding of the sentiments upon which Mrs. Stowe based her polemical arguments will find the poetical works of Mrs. Lydia Huntley Sigourney most valuable. In the quarter of a century before 1855, no American poet held a more popular place in the respect and affections of the American people than did Mrs. Sigourney. Author of fifty-seven volumes of poetry and prose as well as a prodigious amount of newspaper and magazine verse, she gave wide currency to the theme of Christian virtue, trial, and heavenly apotheosis later used by Mrs. Stowe, to her own effect.[9]

The Power of Self-sacrifice

As Kathryn Kish Sklar observes, the most powerful tenet supporting the ideology of domesticity is the principle of female self-sacrifice. Thus it is no accident that Uncle Tom shows himself worthy of domestic happiness by exemplary self-sacrifice, a female virtue. The prose and poetry of popular nineteenth century literature continually demonstrates how the ethic of suffering infused the domestic virtues with pietistic religious value. In a work which makes for illuminating collateral reading, George M. Frederickson describes how Northern leaders during and after the 1850s adopted the ethic of suffering, the idea that the highest achievement of an individual's life is to sacrifice it for others. Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr., for example, expresses the concept forcefully in his Civil War Letters. Mrs. Stowe achieved a double impact by creating a protagonist who exemplified both the ethic of suffering and a devotion to domesticity.[10]

In fact, by connecting Uncle Tom to two additional Victorian cultural postulates–the belief in the saintly heroine and the concept of the evangelical angel who is too pure to live but guides by her heavenly spirit,–Mrs. Stowe gave her story's namesake a quadrupled iconic power. "Like the very gentle perfect knight of the middle ages and the noble savage of the eighteenth century," the author of *The American Eve in Fact and Fiction, 1775-1914* tells us, "the saintly heroine came to be accepted as fact."[11] Her likeness can be found, for example, in Dickens' *The Old Curiosity Shop* (1840-41) in which the adventures of Little Nell culminate in a celebrated deathbed scene not unlike that of Little Eva's. The two American novels of the early 1850's which outsold all others except *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Mary Jane Holmes' *Tempest and Sunshine* (1854) and Maria Susanna Cummings' *The Lamplighter* (1854), both feature saintly heroines. Mrs. Sigourney's poetry, like so much of the sentimental and religious literature of the time, is filled with the popular image of the childhood death of the evangelical angel.[12]

Little Eva

In Little Eva, the themes of the saintly heroine, the deathbed suffering of the domestic jewel, and the figure of the evangelical angel were collapsed into a single image whose potency Mrs. Stowe used for polemical purposes. The feelings of love and pity which Eva evoked in the audience were intended to overwhelm the intellect of any who doubted the soundness of the author's arguments against slavery. The heart warming sentiments, divine brightness, and the purity associated with golden Eva spilled over and enlightened the audience's feelings towards Uncle Tom.

In fact, Mrs. Stowe considered the sympathetic suffering of a heavenly child-innocent to be so important a rhetorical device that she used it twice. In addition to the figure of Little Eva, in Chapter IX of the novel, she called upon mothers who had suffered the loss of a child to follow the example of Senator Bird's wife. Abstract pro-slavery arguments of the type advanced by Senator Bird could be overwhelmed by homely feelings of grief over "The Lost Darling," as Mrs. Sigourney titled one of her poems on the subject.[13] Clearly Mrs. Stowe counted heavily on her public's support for the notion that evangelical angels constituted a valid guide for mundane behavior.

African-American Messianism

No consideration of Mrs. Stowe's arguments against slavery would be complete without mention of her reliance upon the popular notion of the American cultural scene which her work did so much to articulate and–for better or worse–did so much to strengthen. This notion is the concept of African-American messianism, the belief in the redemptive mission of the black race. Elaborating on the religious doctrine of the suffering servant of God and extending this Christological theme to the context of American society, Mrs. Stowe, as Wilson J. Moses cogently argues, concretized the principle of black messianism in the figure of Uncle Tom. He acted out the

idea that African-Americans had developed a moral superiority to white Americans as a result of their passive acceptance of suffering. Relying upon "the retributive and masochistic elements of the Christian ideology," as Moses terms the values of Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* pictured how black Americans, by virtue of their suffering had become Christ-like and possessed of "a natural predisposition to Christian principles." Accepting the idea of black Christian heroism, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* implied that a nation which linked its destiny with the uplift of its black population would help inaugurate the millenium. Sympathy for a race of Uncle Toms gained appeal by the argument that the messianic mission of American blacks promised a transcendant spiritual transformation of white America.[14]

This appeal was made even stronger by the fact that the traits of black messianism which Uncle Tom symbolized promised little disruption in the established relations of the races, assuming that all ex-slaves could not be colonized in Africa. Uncle Tom's forgiveness, cooperativeness, unselfish loyalty, humble reverence, and genteel submissiveness made him an ideal popular character for a nation that wished to solve the issue of slavery while remaining socially superior to the ex-slave and feeling morally justified, even redeemed in the process.

In *Uncle Tom's Cabin,* Mrs. Stowe succeeded in giving narrative form to stereotypical black racial traits which numerous white clergymen and contemporary black spokesmen offered as part of their arguments for black freedom. The popularity of her story owes much to the extent to which it used their beliefs to move the public to feel renewed confidence in their Christian probity and their social and national identity. In her outcry against sin, Harriet Beecher Stowe upheld the kind of established cultural values which her audience found both morally therapeutic and comfortable.[15]

STOWE'S BLACK MATERNAL CHRIST, TOM

by Elizabeth Ammons

Uncle Tom's Cabin was first published ten years before the Civil War in the antislavery newspaper *The National Era.* Harriet Beecher Stowe's sister-in-law had written to her in outrage over the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, which made it illegal even in the North to aid or house runaway slaves: "If I could use a pen as you can, I would write something that would make this whole nation feel what an accursed thing slavery is." Stowe's reaction, her son later recalled, was immediate and dramatic. "Mrs. Stowe rose up from her chair, crushing the letter in her hand, and with an expression on her face that stamped itself on the mind of her child, said: 'I will write something. I will if I live.'"[1]

Appropriately, this scene was recalled by one of Stowe's children, for Harriet Beecher Stowe wrote her inflammatory antislavery novel as a mother. Years later she reminisced for one of her adult children, "I well remember the winter you were a baby and I was writing 'Uncle Tom's Cabin.' My heart was bursting with the anguish excited by the cruelty and injustice our nation was showing to the slave, and praying God to let me do a little and to cause my cry for them to be heard. I remember many a night weeping over you as you lay sleeping beside me, and I thought of the slave mothers whose babies were torn from them."One of her seven children died, and Stowe said, "It was at his dying bed and at his grave that I learned what a poor slave mother may feel when her child is torn away from her."[2] In *Uncle Tom's Cabin* Stowe converts this acute personal empathy with slave mothers into a powerful argument in favor of a revolutionary new world order inspired by maternal—as opposed to patriarchal—values. Those values reverberate in the book, as I will go on to explain in a number of mothers both black and white; in the other-worldly little mother Eva; and most of all in the maternal black Christ, Tom.[3]

Stowe's Background

In many ways, Stowe was an ideal person to accost the conscience of white America in the decade before the war. Born a Beecher, she was destined to evangelize. Her famous father Lyman was a minister; her six brothers were ministers; she married a minister. Spreading the gospel, including the social gospel of Abolition, was a family calling,[4] even if Harriet Beecher did not come to it until middle life.

Born in 1811 in Litchfield, Connecticut, where her mother died when the child was five, Harriet Elizabeth Beecher moved West with her family in 1832 to Cincinnati, Ohio. There her prominent father, a remote autocratic man, took over the presidency of Lane Theological Seminary while Harriet worked for her famous sister Catharine, the educator and domestic ideologist, who founded the Western Female Institute. Not a teacher at heart, Harriet Beecher in January of 1836 married a professor at Lane Seminary, Calvin Stowe, and in September gave birth to twins. In the years that followed she devoted herself, in the days before electricity or household conveniences, to the hard work of running a large house and raising six children on very little money. Overworked, rundown by repeated childbearing, poor and exhausted most of the time, Stowe in Cincinnati witnessed race riots, lost a child, lived daily with the misery of endlessly performing mindless menial tasks for others, and was plagued by feelings of exile and isolation from her beloved birthplace, New England. Most important, she was haunted by the horrifying spectacle of runaway slaves being forced back into bondage across the muddy Ohio to the slave-state Kentucky. All of these experiences prepared her to write *Uncle Tom's Cabin* when she and her family moved from Cincinnati to Brunswick, Maine, in 1850.

Stowe's Influence

The book was an unprecedented best-seller. Demand for *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in 1852, the year it was published in book-fom, kept fourteen power printing presses running day and night; unauthorized stage-versions sprang up at every cross-roads; "Tom" gimcracks and knickknacks streamed onto the market; hastily written anti-Tom novels burst from the South in retaliation and defense while admiring bandwagon-imitations came out in the North. No book before or for many years after had such an impact, as President Lincoln's alleged reception of Stowe at the White House in the 1860s suggests: "So you are the little lady who started the great war."

True or not, the book made Harriet Beecher Stowe an internationally famous author in a matter of months. She rapidly became, and remained, the most celebrated American writer of the 19th century, and she continues to be one of the most important. Few books can claim the widespread influence of Stowe's novel. Moreover, *Uncle Tom's Cabin,* though Romantic in some ways, is the first major American novel in the Realistic mode; Stowe is in many respects the architect of American Realism, preceding both William Dean Howells and Henry James, each of whom admired her work. In addition, as a woman writer she is the first major novelist in the United States to break away from the expectation that women should write almost exclusively for women, limiting themselves mainly to formulaic and conventional women's stories.[5] Stowe stands as a pioneer in the history of American women writers, a foremother, so to speak, of artistically ambitious women novelists from Edith Wharton and Willa Cather at the turn of the century to Toni Morrison and Joan Didion today.

Her Career as Writer

Although Stowe had published short stories about New England before the 1850s, only after *Uncle Tom's Cabin* did she have the freedom, because she had the money and therefore the time, to write fulltime. Immediately, she published *A Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1853), a fascinating compilation of source material about slavery which, in response to charges that the novel misrepresented the truth, she claimed to have been her data. (In fact most of the material in the *Key* was probably collected after the writing of the novel.) She then published a second antislavery novel, *Dred; A Tale of the Great Dismal Swamp* (1856). Though not as powerful as *Uncle Tom,* the book sold well. It draws heavily on Nat Turner Rebellion material and is interesting in showing Stowe in sympathy with certain militant antislavery positions. After *Dred,* Stowe returned to New England material, publishing a series of excellent books: *The Minister's Wooing* in 1859, *The Pearl of Orr's Island* in 1862, *Oldtown Folks* in 1869, *Sam Lawson's Oldtown Fireside Stories* in 1872, and *Poganuc People* in 1878. She also wrote three society novels–*My Wife and I* (1871), *Pink and White Tyranny* (1871), and *We and Our Neighbors* (1875)–which are undistinguished, especially when compared with her antislavery and New England fiction.

During her life Stowe's most shocking act as a writer came in 1870 with the publication of *Lady Byron Vindicated,* a factual (as opposed to fictional) book which charged that the poet Lord Byron, who had died in 1824, had maintained an incestuous relationship with his half-sister while married to Lady Byron. The book scandalized Britain and America. To attack Lord Byron was to attack a romantic cult-hero; to listen to his wife's side of things, which Stowe did, was to ignore literary protocol in such matters. Furthermore incest was an unspeakable topic, particularly for a woman. Nevertheless, Stowe's motive for writing the exposé, which almost cost her her reputation as a respectable Christian writer, is finally not hard to understand. She wrote it, as she had written *Uncle Tom's Cabin* almost twenty years earlier, because her conscience as a human being, and specifically as a woman, forbade her remaining silent. *Lady Byron Vindicated* was Stowe's second ethically radical act as a writer.

Advocacy of Maternal Values

Her first of course was *Uncle Tom's Cabin,* radical not so much in its advocacy of freedom for all black Americans–many people of both races had been calling for Abolition for at least two decades when Stowe published her book–but in its vision of women and maternal values as the only hope for the creation of a new, democratic, nonexploitive and non-slaveholding America. Perhaps most surprising, especially for modern readers, the central figure in that vision is not a woman but, instead, the black man Tom, a politically brilliant amalgam of maternal and Christlike qualities. Stowe makes Tom a classic Victorian heroine: gentle, pious, nonviolent, long-suffering, self-sacrificing, and endlessly loving. He partakes both of the image of Christ and of the image of Mother, the two being interchangeable for Harriet Beecher Stowe. In this deliberately unusual characterization Stowe displays shrewd political strategy. She make Tom unthreatening in any literal way that might fuel the racism of belligerent whites who maintained that blacks were brutes who must be oppressed; also she argues her case for nonviolent resistance to slavery as the only hope for the permanent eradication of a system based on violence. But most important, Stowe's characterization of Tom cleverly insinuates him, a slave and a man, into the 19th-century idolatry of feminine, and specifically maternal, virtue.

At the time Stowe wrote her novel many Americans believed that men and women properly occupied two separate "spheres," the masculine one worldly, competitive, and commercial, the feminine one domestic, that is, home-centered, and therefore characterized by an opposing set of values: cooperation rather than competition, self-sacrifice rather than self-promotion, gentleness rather than aggressiveness, nurture rather than rivalry. Stowe did not believe that this was how the world should be ordered, as she shows repeatedly in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* by emphasizing the moral superiority of mothers (wicked Marie St. Clare is the sole exception, thus proving the rule). In Stowe's view the feminine "sphere" should be the only sphere. Motherhood should be the ethical ideal of all human beings.

Stowe includes Rachel Halliday in the novel to illustrate her position. Ethically the Quakers are matrifocal. They do not believe in physical violence, laissez-faire capitalism, or automatic subservience to patriarchal authority–the basic principles, of course, on which slavery is built. Instead, they practice pacifism, egalitarianism, and cooperativism. As believers in this alternative, anti-masculinist ethic, they actively oppose slavery; and the person who sits at the head of this community's table in Stowe's vision is not the father but the mother: "Rachel never looked so truly and benignly happy as at the head of her table. There was so much motherliness and full-heartedness even in the way she passed a plate of cakes or poured a cup of coffee, that it seemed to put a spirit into the food and drink she offered" (I, 205).[6] Rachel Halliday evokes Christ at the Last Supper making of simple food and drink a sacrament; she suggests how healing and nourishing mother-rule might be.

It is no accident that mothers, as a class, most consistently oppose slavery in Stowe's novel. They are in her opinion its logical antagonists. The planter's wife, Mrs. Shelby; the senator's wife, Mrs. Bird; the slaves Aunt Chloe, Eliza, and

Cassy; the Quaker matron Rachel Halliday: these women in their speech and actions attack slavery as an unconscionable evil created and maintained by white men. Repeatedly Stowe emphasizes how the slave-system perverts family-life by tearing parent from child, and especially mother from child, in violation of life's most basic tie: the bond between mother and son or daughter. The book dwells on this tragedy for two reasons. First, the grief of black mothers exposes as racist the myth prevalent in Stowe's day that enslavement of blacks was permissible because they did not have the same feelings about family that whites had. Clearly, they did have the same feelings, Stowe's novel insists. To maintain otherwise was to lie. The second reason for Stowe's emphasis on black mothers' pain is more complicated: it allowed her to exploit, in a positive sense, the 19th-century cult of Motherhood.

The Cult of Motherhood

To understand that strategy in the novel it is important to remember that ideologically motherhood is always a variable rather than a fixed concept. Its definition and status change depending upon time, place, class and tribe. In Stowe's America, which was white, middle-class, Protestant, and in power, mothering enjoyed high prestige in theory. As the historian Kathryn Kish Sklar explains using Stowe's sister Catharine Beecher as her representative theorist, "adopting a typical Victorian perspective, Beecher viewed motherhood as a qualitative rather than a quantitative activity, useful to society for the kind of child rather than the number of children it produced." Sklar continues to describe this typical Victorian outlook, which incidentally still prevails: "Beecher's view of the relationship between childhood and society was an essentially modern one. Rather than viewing society as a traditional set of established controls, and early childhood as a time when the will must be broken to conform to those controls, she saw society as an uncontrolled growth, except as it was regulated by the internalized values of 'character' developed during early childhood. Seeing it possible to exert in early childhood an influence of lifelong personal and social significance, Victorians were far more sensitive than their ancestors had been to the importance of the right kind of mothering."[7] This right kind of mothering, "qualitative mothering," was woman's supreme calling in Stowe's America. To provide children with love and to teach them to internalize the values of hard work, integrity, and the avoidance of evil was the sacred, and extremely socially useful, job of Mother. It was believed that the very nature of society, its morality, depended upon such mothering: rupture the maternal bond and society would stand at risk; support the work of mothers and a moral society would emerge. Strategically then, if in her novel Stowe could affirm this Victorian reverence for mothering and at the same time show how slavery profanes motherhood–literally ripping mothers and children apart–she might rouse antislavery passions in thousands of complacent white Americans.

Stowe's Characterization of Tom

Stowe's odd characterization of Tom makes most sense against this backdrop of maternal ideals. A couple of years after the publication of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* Harriet Beecher Stowe stated her ideological premise outright: "This story is to show how Jesus Christ, who liveth and was dead, and now is alive and forevermore, has still a mother's love for the poor and lowly."[8] Stowe renders this "mother's love" in the novel in her portraits of good mothers of both races; in the character of angelic little Eva, appropriately named for the mother of the race and yet as pure, loving, and self-sacrificing as Christ; and in Tom: a compassionate home-centered black man with "a voice as tender as a woman's" (I, 151) and a soul as full of

THE READING LESSON

pity and mercy as Jesus'. Precisely Tom's softness, in other words, is his strength for Stowe. He is not aggressive, hard, self-centered. He is not "masculine." He is aligned instead with mother love and Christ. He opposes iron-knuckled bullet-headed Simon Legree, Stowe's nightmare exaggeration of traditional masculinity, with a passive resistance as terrifyingly frustrating to the brutal white man as was Jesus' to his oppressors. Infuriated, Legree vows that he will make Tom "hard" (II, 189): ruthless, unfeeling, violent. He not only fails but is undone by the attempt. Abetted by the literal mother Cassy, who with Tom manipulates Legree's terror of the feminine, Tom's refusal to emulate the masculine Legree (he will not flog his fellow slaves) literally maddens the white man to death.

Maternal Tom

In an age that idealized motherhood and called itself Christian, Stowe's feminization of Tom was politically ingenious. What better way to create sympathy for slaves than by creating a slave protagonist as gentle as Mother and yet as morally irradiating as Christ? Even more subtle, what better way to confront white fear of the black male than by creating in Tom, a dark-skinned physically powerful man, a paragon of Christian maternal virtue? It should be emphasized that Stowe could imagine admirable black male characters who were not pacifist and not incredibly forgiving, as she makes clear in the character of George Harris. (Dred is another example.) Indeed, more than a few readers have wished that she had made Harris her central character. For the danger built in Tom is that he is so simple, so good, and so forgiving that he can reinforce the stereotype of the docile darkey instead of appearing admirably Christlike, as Stowe surely intended.[9] The point to remember is that understood historically and understood as Stowe created him in her novel as opposed to the perversions of the character that show up in most stage-versions and derivative novels,[10] Tom is a daring conception. He is an attempt at shocking white America into moral action by pulling together in a black man the two images most revered in the dominant culture: the image of Christ and the image of Mother.

The Motherly Christ

That those two images were one and the same for Stowe is beyond question. She declared several years after she wrote the novel that "there was in Jesus more of the pure feminine element than any other man." She analyzed Jesus' relationship with his mother, "He was bone of her bone and flesh of her flesh–his life grew out of her immortal nature," and argued that Jesus' unusual birth "made him more purely sympathetic with his mother than any other son of woman. He had no mortal father. All that was human in him was her nature.... It was the feminine element exalted and taken in union with divinity."[11] This feminine Christ stands at the heart of Stowe's vision of reform. In her view maternal love, which is synonymous with the love of Christ, alone can lead America out of the moral wilderness of slavery. To illustrate the transforming power of such love in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* she makes Tom, whom she associates with the feminine and motherly values of piety, compassion, domesticity (even the title links him to the idea of "home"), and nonviolence, a model of Christlike virtue. He is the prime example of Stowe's moral position in the novel.

Close to the end of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* Stowe confronts the reader directly. She says a few things to sailors, shipowners, and farmers and then turns to her real hope:

> Mothers of America,–you, who have learned, by the cradles of your own children, to love and feel for all mankind,–by the sacred love you bear your child; by your joy in his beautiful, spotless infancy; by the motherly pity and tenderness with which you guide his growing years; by the anxieties of his education; by the prayers you breathe for his soul's eternal good;–I beseech you, pity the mother who has all your affections, and not one legal right to protect, guide, or educate, the child of her bosom! By the sick hour of your child; by those dying eyes, which you could never forget; by those last cries, that wrung your heart when you could neither help nor save; by the desolation of that empty cradle, that silent nursery,–I beseech you, pity those mothers who are constantly made childless by the American slavetrade! And say, mothers of America, is this a thing to be defended, sympathized with, passed over in silence? (I., 316).

For Harriet Beecher Stowe the answer was clear. No.

LITHOGRAPH USED FOR ADVANCE PUBLICITY IN THE EARLY DAYS. ELIZA CROSSING THE ICE

SETTING THE 19th CENTURY STAGE FOR *UNCLE TOM'S CABIN*: From New York Theatres To "Tom Shows" In Town Halls and Tents

By Glenn Loney

When *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was adapted for the stage, spectacle was an important element in a production's success. Audiences expected to see some marvelous effects–real stage magic–as well as to feast their eyes on handsomely painted scenes of locales they might themselves never be able to visit. Fortunately for all concerned on both sides of the footlights, Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel offered ample scope for the most gifted of scene-painters and the most resourceful devisers of special effects. Quite remarkable things could be done on the major stages of New York and London. The larger and more prosperous the theatre, the more impressive the scenery and the special effects for *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, notably on those occasions when four or five other theatres nearby were offering competing stagings of the play.

Modern audiences may believe themselves more sophisticated than those who saw Mrs. Stowe's anti-slavery fable premiered on stage. Nonetheless, melodrama and spectacle, when they are handsomely packaged, still delight theatregoers. Television viewers settle for relatively little sophistication in their melodrama. Transported back to New York's old National Theatre via Time Machine to see the original *Uncle Tom's Cabin* such spectators would probably enjoy themselves–and the production–very much, especially an unrolling panorama of the Mississippi with a steamboat race in front of it.

Eighteenth Century Theatres

In the 1850's, when *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was beginning its long stage career, the major theatres in New York and London which at various times housed the show still had some of the features of 18th century theatres. For those who'd like to know more about this interesting process of development, a good place to begin is with Brooks McNamara's *The American Playhouse in the Eighteenth Century*,[1] because it demonstrates the debt our playhouses owed to those of London and the British provinces.

The theatres, the stages, the plays, the actors, and the audiences interacted. In the typical auditorium, what we now call the orchestra seating was then known as the pit. Unfortunately for the pit's occupants, at least in the more rowdy neighborhoods, high up in the balconies or galleries–"Paradise" or "The Gods"–lively boys, brawlers, thugs, and burly workmen packed the benches for as little as ten cents a place. If they didn't like the performers, they might hit those in the pit with thrown bottles and other objects which missed the stage.

Separating the pit occupants from the unruly balcony crowds were three or four tiers of boxes stretching around the auditorium from the proscenium arch at stage-right to the other side of the arch at stage-left. Often shaped like a great U, when these boxes were richly decorated and gilded, the tiers resembled a giant "Golden Horseshoe."

A disadvantage of such curving boxes was that some of them, especially those close to the stage and higher up, didn't have good "sight-lines" for the stage-picture. To offset that, earlier theatres had developed broad "aprons," or forestages, pushed well out in front of the proscenium arch, which provided a frame for the scenic picture. Aprons remained in the 19th century, separated from the pit audience by a narrow space for the theatre's orchestra, which today is called the or-

chestra pit. Every theatre had one, and music was generously used. Some of the stage action–often a great deal of it–was presented on the apron or well downstage within the proscenium picture, to make sure spectators on the sides and high up in the balcony could see as much as possible. Footlights also aided in illuminating the players.

When *Uncle Tom's Cabin* first appeared, a 17th and 18th century European device for shifting scenes–somewhat simplified for American stages–was popular. Most productions used two-dimensional scenery, in which rooms and building-exteriors, forests and clouds, were all depicted on a system of wings and drops. There might be as many as four or five separate sets of wings on each side of the stage, spaced so that there was a receding central perspective with the five wings on each side representing tree-trunks. When a central capstan beneath the stage began to turn, these would slide offstage just as cloud-wings or room-wings slid on. At the same time, coordinated ropes would raise leafy tree-borders up out of sight, lowering instead a cloud-border or a ceiling-border. Upstage, the forest scene would also be replaced by a bank of clouds or a wall of a room. All of the ropes and pulleys were arranged so that the transformations were simultaneous and virtually instantaneous.

Many theatres in 19th century America used this European scene-shifting system in a greatly simplified form. Instead of having the complicated below-stage machinery, the parallel wing-flats were shoved on and off the stage by stagehands, using a set of overhead wooden grooves to guide and steady them. Grooves could be provided on the stage-floor as well to prevent wobbling. Scene changes had to have stagehands pushing and pulling actual flats. Fortunately for ticket-prices, stagehands–like actors–were not paid much.

That, incidentally, is why New York and London theatres in Victoria's time could afford lavish scenic spectacles and huge casts. It didn't cost much to build and paint scenery–which was often used again and again in widely varying shows, so that some *Uncle Tom* productions had scenes in Rome and the Orient because that was the scenery the theatre-owner had on hand. It also was inexpensive to have a number of stagehands to make many scenic changes

Not all American regional or British provincial theatres were so well equipped as those in New York and London. Major touring *Uncle Tom's Cabin* shows obviously could only be booked into well equipped theatres, unless they had made special plans for stripped-down versions of their production in some smaller cities. Those Tom troupes which played only smaller theatres, especially in the latter part of the 19th century, would more often have reduced their scenery to its simplest elements for ease in transporting, setting-up, playing, and striking. Instead of the more elaborate, heavy, and costly wing-flats, they might use only scenes painted on drops and borders which could be quickly rolled up into the "flies" for rapid scene changes and for simplicity in touring.

Raked or slightly inclined stages, rising toward the upstage, were popular, improving the stage-picture and facilitating perspective views. Such stages were not well suited to box-sets–nor to stage-grooves, yet one of the few historic American theatres which still has its grooves in place, Piper's Opera House, in Virginia City, Nevada, also has a raked stage. Of course *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was played a number of times on its stage, so the troupes had to adapt their scenery and effects to what they found on Piper's stage.

The practice of "flying" whole act-curtains, backdrops, rigid wing-sections, and other scenic elements was gradually replacing the old-fashioned stage-groove method. This made possible quick scene changes, but the magic transformations of former times could not be achieved. With a tall stagehouse in which to conceal settings suspended on ropes over the stage, more lavish, impressive scenes had become possible–and more of them as well. Once again, however, an *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, designed to be "flown," could only be toured to those theatres rigged for flying.

Roving "Tom" troupes, playing one-night stands all over America, had to make do with what they had and what they found. Some were so small that a number of minor roles, and occasionally Little Eva as well, had to be played by local citizens with little or no rehearsal. Harlowe Hoyt recalls the heyday of the "Tom Shows" in small towns in *Town Hall Tonight*,[2] devoting an entire chapter to the topic. Some towns had "Opera Houses"–like Virginia City; others had town halls. Most opera-houses, especially in the Far West, had never had a real opera on their stages. Town halls often were nothing more than simple auditoriums on the second floors of buildings which might have a store or some town offices below. Some had a raised stage, no wings, no overhead–and certainly no flying, no orchestra pit, and a collection of bentwood chairs for the audiences. Over the years, a live mule became an indispensible comic property for Lawyer Marks in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. One of Hoyt's favorite boyhood memories is of the actors who played Marks having to push the reluctant mules up three flights of outside stairs to reach the town hall stage.

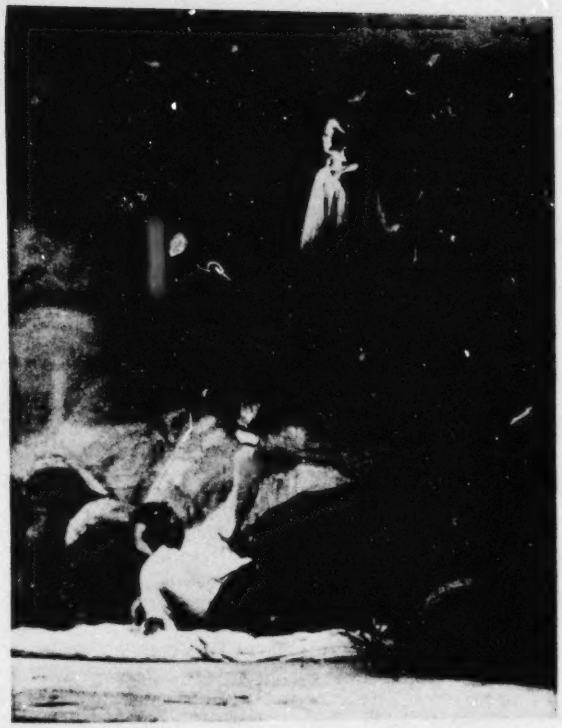
The definitive book about the stage and film career of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is Harry Birdoff's *The World's Greatest Hit*.[3] In it, he provides some memorable descriptions of the major spectacles in the show, as given at different times in various places by numerous troupes. When it was staged in London at Astley's Royal Amphitheatre, home of equestrian shows, naturally a lot of horses and feats of horsemanship suddenly became part of Uncle Tom's saga. Astley's was famous not only for its beautiful horses and trick-performing steeds. It also specialized in rapid changes of wild, exciting scenery as well as dramatic conflagrations. Considering the lack of fireproofing, the use of gas in footlights and other stage lighting, and the highly inflammable muslin drops and borders, it's daunting to read of lightning and fire effects achieved with handfuls of resin or flash-powder ignited by sparks or open flames.

Special Scenic Effects: Eliza on the Ice

Eliza's escape across the Ohio River–one of the most famous scenes from the play, prominently featured in its advertising posters for decades–is most frequently described as being accomplished by having the actress playing Eliza hop across the stage, fleeing slavers who wish to return her to bondage, from one white-painted soap-box to another. We still talk about politicians on the campaign-trail as "getting up on their soap-boxes" to woo the voters. In the 19th century, it's clear that soap-boxes–once the soap was gone–were used by both politicians and actors. They seem to have been a standard prop for *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. A very elaborate production in Paris, however, is reported to have done this scene with blocks of real ice. In some productions, Eliza hopped offstage into the wings after her first crossing. When next seen, she'd hop out from the next upstage wing, moving toward the free Ohio shore, but this time a girl or smaller actress would be playing Eliza, to give the impression that she was now much farther away from the audience. The proscenium arch is after all a picture-frame, and within that frame, all kinds of scenic illusions are possible–if only the audience is willing to help by using its imagination, or what has been called "the willing suspension of disbelief."

Little Eva's Death Scene

Many an *Uncle Tom's Cabin* production made good use



of scrim transparencies. These are still used on Broadway and on the opera stage, and they never cease to amaze those who've not seen the effect before. Scrim is a very loosely woven cloth or net, like cheesecloth but very strong. Painted with a scene and hung from a batten or a wooden-roller, it will look much like any other two-dimensional scenery painted on rigid flats or sturdy muslin as long as it is lit from the front. But, as soon as light is brought up behind the scrim, the scene on its front begins to fade; it gradually becomes transparent, revealing all that is behind it. When the light in front is extinguished, usually all traces of the scene painted on the scrim seem to vanish. Turn the rear lights down or off, bringing up the front lights, and the scene will again appear.

Little Eva's famous Death Scene often required scrim for its most impressive realization on stage. As the grieving actors crowded round Little Eva's bed in this scene, the actress playing that role would take advantage of their concealment to slip out unseen by the audience. Then she'd get up on a backstage table and onto a ladder mounted on that. In some versions, she'd have a wreath of roses to hold up symbolically over the head of a kneeling, praying Uncle Tom. A circle of light would illuminate her face—not the ladder—and through the scrim the audience would see what they could imagine to be her spirit, giving its benediction to the courageous, long-suffering Uncle Tom.

Sometimes Little Eva would be seen through the scrim ascending to heaven on the back of a winged dove. Harry Birdoff has recorded an eyewitness report of an *Uncle Tom* Apotheosis scene, made by the popular actor DeWolf Hopper: "Three tiers of profile pink and white clouds, edged with gold and silver spangles, were planted on the stage floor. The voices of the celestial choir issued from behind the gauze-covered scrim perforations of the canvas drop, then the floodlights backstage were turned on, and the holes became little golden stars twinkling through the glow—revealing a winged Eva—with a covey of attendant angels suspended midair with piano wire, all swaying as if in a gentle spring breeze. And in the foremost rank of the profile clouds, Uncle Tom knelt with uplifted arms. Then a golden shower drenched Uncle Tom, a scenic effect startlingly new to Hopper."[4]

Panoramas

Panoramas, long popular as scenic entertainments by themselves, were added to *Uncle Tom's Cabin* productions to attract audiences. Simply, a panorama was a very long expanse of muslin or canvas with an extensive scene painted on it, the whole mounted vertically on rollers at either side of the upstage. Unrolling from right to left, it could give audiences the illusion thay they were, for instance, travelling up the Hudson River from Manhattan, seeing interesting spots such as West Point along the way. Integrated into a play such as *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, a panorama could be used to heighten the excitement of a chase sequence, such as Eliza's flight across the Ohio. Or it could be used to depict Mississippi River scenery, as a steamboat took slaves down to auction in New Orleans. (With a boat or a train interior fixed on the stage, a panorama moving by, visible to the audience through the windows, gave a powerful effect of motion to the actually stationary cabin or compartment.)

The Steamboat Race

Steamboats and even famous steamboat races were worked into productions of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. One celebrated stage-race climaxed with a collision and the fiery explosion of one of the boats. The illusion of a boat receding from the audience as it sailed diagonally upstage could be heightened by having it sail into the wings, only to emerge—in a much smaller model—from the next upstage wing on that side and sail across on a higher diagonal to the opposite wing. It sounds elemental and not very convincing, but under gaslight it worked well. Even today, when this effect is cleverly used with electric light, it creates the desired illusion.

Other accounts of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* are recorded in Garff Wilson's *Three Hundred Years of Drama and Theatre*,[5] Barnard Hewitt's *Theatre U.S.A.*,[6] and Richard Moody's *Dramas from the American Theatre*,[7] but they are summaries, compared to the wealth of detail and amusing anecdote Harry Birdoff has compiled in his book. He notes that both in Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel and Aiken's adaptation of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* no bloodhounds pursued the frantic Eliza and her tiny baby across the dangerously thawing Ohio River.

The Dogs

The dogs came later, and they were almost never bloodhounds, which looked too droopy and sad to strike much fear into Eliza or the audience. Great Danes and other large dogs would be used; some of them proved fierce. To heighten the effect of their pursuit, some producers would have Eliza carry some raw meat—instead of a rag-baby—wrapped in the little blanket in which she was supposed to be protecting her infant. To spectators it seemed certain the dogs would snatch the babe from Eliza's desperate arms.

Some of the seedy and very small Tom Troupes which ranged through America's hinterlands—"Tomming the tanks," this was called, referring to small communities as "tank-towns"—were reduced to sending on the company mongrel or on some occasions even pushing on a reluctant puppy to pursue Eliza. In such cases, the company could soon find itself being pursued—out of town by angry ticket-buyers.

The Cabin

One scene or prop was essential to a Tom Show. That was the cabin of the title. Those productions which trouped "under canvas," especially the more lavish ones, would often have an Uncle Tom's Cabin constructed on a wagon, one of the touring vehicles which transported players, scenery, and props. When the company arrived in a new town, the tent was pitched and a colorful parade, often worthy of a circus, was staged along the main street to attract audiences. The

cabin was a major feature of the parade, with Uncle Tom and Aunt Chloe aboard, greeting the bystanders and urging them to buy tickets.

The Parade

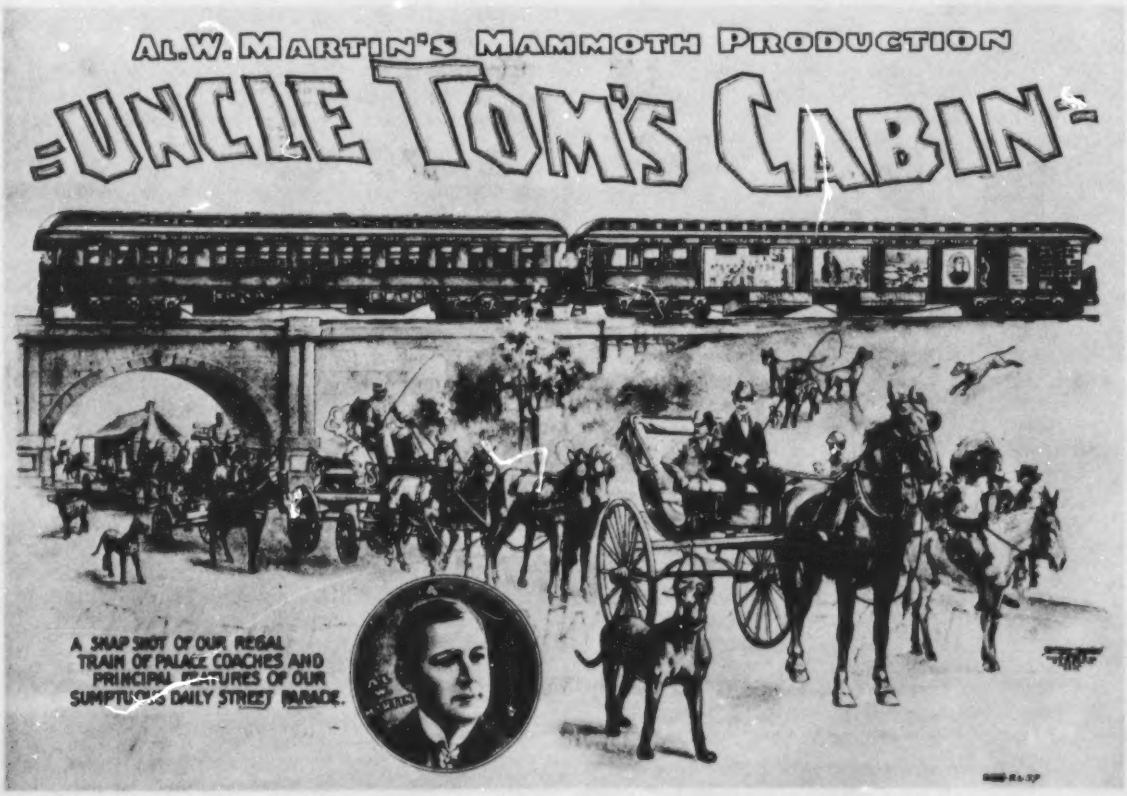
The Tom parade staged by James W. Shipman's troupe included six carved tableaux wagons all decorated, says Harry Birdoff, "like wedding cakes, a gorgeous chariot, floats, a cotton wagon, a log cabin, fourteen panel-box baggage wagons, supplemented by the largest horse and the smallest pony in America, two bands, a female fife-and-drum corps, a troupe of cake-walkers, dogs, oxen, donkeys, six mules, eleven ponies, and forty horses."[8]

Its Historical Role

Today, it may be puzzling to learn about the tremendous, long-lasting popularity of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* as a play, especially when all its variations–additions to and subtractions from–Harriet Beecher Stowe's deeply felt and moving novel so often seem only the calculations of producers primarily interested in making money off unsophisticated audiences with their spectacular stage effects and sentimental melodrama. The real social message–Mrs. Stowe's angry outcry against the monstrous evil of slavery–may have been eclipsed in the comedy, song-and-dance, and special effects. The essential depth and humanity Mrs. Stowe revealed in some of her novel's characters may have been swallowed up in stock stereotypes. After all, for most legitimate actors, the hardy "Tommers" were a breed apart not to be considered as actors at all.

But for decades, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was an old friend to thousands, millions even, especially in isolated communities. Whatever may be said about its shortcomings as a play, as an account of the horrors of slavery, or as a depiction of real men and women, both good and bad–it is one of those now historic plots which won't disappear, even when its social values and attitudes are in disrepute. When Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II created their memorable musical, *The King and I*, based on the sometimes shocking experiences of an English governess (with some of the same firm moral qualities of Harriet Beecher Stowe) in the court of the King of Siam, they, too, revived *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. It was incorporated as a fascinating Siamese ballet, *The Small House of Uncle Thomas*, and its dramatic function was rather artfully to remind the King of Siam that he was also a master of slaves and occasionally a cruel tyrant to them.

Uncle Tom's Cabin, both as novel and play, had something of great historical importance to say. The power of both have been overwhelmingly documented. What tarnished the image and actuality of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* as a drama was, unfortunately, all the melodramatic bathos, the cheap sentimentality, the character stereotyping, the routine stage-business, the obvious vulgar comedy, the appalling casting, and the ultimate dependence on oversold and disappointing spectacle and extraneous special effects. Having two Topsies, two Uncle Toms, two Little Evas, and whole packs of ferocious dogs to chase Eliza across the ice did nothing to preserve or enhance the truth or the drama of the novel. Finally, latter-day productions of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* seemed rather like a 19th century property-man's description of some of his stock: " . . . rainbow, slightly faded . . . a new moon, slightly tarnished . . ."[9]


AL. W. MARTIN'S MAMMOTH PRODUCTION
UNCLE TOM'S CABIN
A SNAP SHOT OF OUR REGAL TRAIN OF PALACE COACHES AND PRINCIPAL FEATURES OF OUR SUMPTUOUS DAILY STREET PARADE.

UNCLE TOM'S CABIN AND MELODRAMA

by
Daniel Gerould

Both in its original form as a novel and in its many stage and film versions, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* belongs to a recognizable genre of popular entertainment, melodrama, which has always been immensely successful with mass audiences, but which until recently has usually been condemned by the official custodians of high culture and refined taste as inherently inferior to tragedy and comedy and beyond the pale of serious art. Although the term "melodramatic" is still most often used in the pejorative sense of something exaggerated and over-emotional (as in "Don't be melodramatic!"), scholars and critics are now more willing to acknowledge the historical importance of melodrama and even to point out its contributions to the development of other, more elevated literary forms, such as the nineteenth-century novel.

It should be possible for us to enjoy melodrama for its own sake, and to study its themes and techniques without any feelings of apology. In fact, to understand and appreciate *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, a masterpiece of the genre, it is most helpful to view the play in the context of melodrama. Let us examine briefly its nature and history.

Melodrama Described

Theatrical rather than literary in its primary appeal, melodrama is a type of popular drama characterized by rapid and exciting physical action, sharply contrasted and simplified characters, and colorful alternation of violence, pathos, and humor. The central situation in melodrama–victimization of helpless innocence by powerful evil forces–gives rise to four basic characters: hero and heroine, assisted by comic ally, pitted against villain. Instead of tragic inevitability, melodrama utilizes coincidence and surprise to keep the action constantly at high tension. Striving for staggering effects and strong emotional shocks, melodramatic dramaturgy builds to frequent climaxes and favors scenes of confrontation, pursuit, and escape, ending in striking tableaux. Language and gesture in melodrama are forceful and impassioned, expressive of primordial feelings and requiring energetic acting.

The melodramatist perceives the world as an arena of intense ethical struggle polarized into moral and material extremes, where the poor but virtuous are persecuted by the rich and corrupt. The motive force of melodrama is the villain, a dynamic and sinister figure recognized by the audience as the embodiment of evil and represented at different times and places by such wielders of tyrannical power as the decadent aristocrat, slavedriver, heartless landlord, factory owner, communist secret police agent, or imperialist exploiter. The denouement, brought about by unexpected reversals, is usually a happy one for the sympathetic characters, resulting in just rewards and punishments and affirming the laws of morality and the benevolent workings of providence. Occasionally the hero is defeated in this world, but shown to be morally superior to his oppressors.

Evolving out of sentimental and bourgeois drama, pantomime, and *opéra-comique* at the end of the eighteenth century, melodrama first appeared in France and England as a result of the battle between the great and small theatres over restrictions limiting performance of spoken drama to licensed houses. The law was successfully circumvented by the use of music, which served as emotional commentary on the action and gave rise to the term melodrama, combining the Greek words for song and play.

Melodrama differs from romantic drama, which it preceded and influenced, in its schematic characterization, insistent emotional motifs, and didactic formulas, and in its use of prose rather than verse. Unlike romantic drama, melodrama had a broad appeal to a large mass audience, consisting of a scarcely literate working class as well as a more educated middle-class public. Guilbert de Pixérécourt, the father of melodrama, said, "I write for those who cannot read," and argued that his plays taught morality and civic virtues.

Nineteenth Century Melodrama

Nineteenth-century melodrama was spectacular in staging, featuring sensational scenes of fires, explosions, avalanches, and shipwrecks, and vivid depictions of city life. In its attention to surface detail and dramatic illusion, and in its careful reconstruction of contemporary settings, rich in local color, melodrama represented a step toward scenic realism. Although initially disparaged by highbrow critics as subliterary and treated with a patronizing smile, melodrama has proved to be one of the most enduring, original, and vital of dramatic genres to evolve in the past two centuries. It continues to be an influential dramatic form today, popular in film and on television as well as on the stage, and attractive to politically committed writers for its propaganda values and to avantgarde artists for its exuberant and unabashed theatricality.

The melodramatic vision also found a home in the fictional worlds of some of the greatest nineteenth-century authors. Novels by writers such as Honoré de Balzac and Charles Dickens, Fyodor Dostoevsky and Henry James, abound in melodramatic confrontations, persecution of the poor and downtrodden, and all the thrills and excitement of pursuit and flight, rendered psychologically and morally complex by the novelist's subtle probings–as compared to the stage melodramatist's more rudimentary techniques.

It is little wonder that novels, such as Dicken's *Oliver Twist*, *Nicholas Nickleby*, and *A Tale of Two Cities*, were repeatedly adapted for the stage, and many of the great theatrical hits of the nineteenth century were dramatic versions of popular fiction. Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* became the most famous of all such adaptations. The phenomenal success of the novel, first serialized in magazine form and then published as a book in 1852 (miners in the California gold fields were soon renting copies at two bits a day!), was equalled and even surpassed by the vogue enjoyed by the many different stage versions that flourished throughout the world in the second half of the century. Of the more than a dozen in English, the adaptation by George Aiken prepared for the production at the Troy Museum in Troy, New York, is by far the best and the most faithful to Mrs. Stowe's novel.

Foreign versions were naturally geared to the values and culture of the country in question. In the best known French adaptation of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, by Dennery and Dumanoir in 1853, Simon Legree, Little Eva, Topsy, and Miss Ophelia have all been omitted as too parochially American, and instead the Parisian playwrights have made one of Mrs. Stowe's weakest creations, the comic but kind-hearted Senator Bird (wisely dropped by Aiken) into a central character whom the French audiences can understand. In this sentimental debasement of Harriet Beecher Stowe's bitter indictment of slavery, whites are generous and benevolent to grateful blacks; undergoing a change of heart, Haley renounces the slave trade and buys George's freedom from his cruel master Harris, who is a mulatto. On the other hand, in a famous Soviet adaptation done by Alexandra Brushtein in 1925 as a melodrama for children and up-dated in 1948 in the context of the Cold war, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is placed in a modern frame showing a black woman, Dorothy, and her daughter, Cora, as victims of racial prejudice in twentieth-century America. Injured in an automobile accident, Cora cannot understand why no whites will stop to help her; to explain the nature and origins of racism, her mother tells Cora the story of Uncle Tom,

which then becomes enacted on stage in a radically transformed version stressing the evils of American society.

In the nineteenth century, the process of adaptation sometimes went in the opposite direction; highly successful stage melodramas were quickly novelized to cash in on the fame of the play and reach an as yet untapped reading public. We should remember that the reading of plays (except for those by Shakespeare and important poets) had become a lost art in the English-speaking world by this time due to the low esteem in which the stage was held. In fact, melodramas and other popular plays were printed only in unattractive acting editions full of technical stage directions and abbreviations intended for the performers. It was not until the end of the century when George Bernard Shaw decided to write his plays from the point of view of the reader, not the actor or director, that the texts of contemporary drama became readily accessible in book form and play-reading once again became widespread.

Uncle Tom's Cabin as Melodrama

The text of George Aiken's version of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* included in *American Melodrama* (Performing Arts Journal Publications, 1983) follows closely the original Samuel French edition from the 1850s. All the indications of stage business used in the Troy Museum production have been retained in order to preserve the authentic flavor of nineteenth-century melodrama; only directions specifying right or left have been dropped as imparting nothing of value to the modern reader or theatre worker.

We should be prepared for a high degree of tendentiousness in a work such as *Uncle Tom's Cabin.* Irony, objectivity, and detachment are not virtues in melodrama. Instead, the author is openly partisan and takes sides for and against. Because he plays on his audience's feelings through the use of strong dramatic situations, the melodramatist does not aim for a distanced, impartial, or even aesthetically disciplined response; rather, his goal is to stir and incite the spectators as a group. Hence the characteristic "rooting" for the hero and heroine, hissing of the villain, and shedding tears for the innocent little victim. In *Uncle Tom's Cabin,* we are expected to cheer the daring escape of Eliza across the ice into the free state of Ohio, execrate Simon Legree for his cruel killing of Tom, and weep over Little Eva's untimely death.

Here there arises an interesting question of audience psychology. Why in melodrama, we may well ask, do we enjoy witnessing the victimization of innocence and the oppression of the downtrodden? How, for example, can we take pleasure in seeing Legree brutally beat Uncle Tom to death? Is it simply due to (in Leslie Fiedler's words) "the mass audience's need for righteous indignation and sadomasochistic titillation"? The case against *Uncle Tom's Cabin*–voiced by many political activists in the 1940s and 50s–has been that it idealizes a black hero who passively consents to his own extermination. But the truth is that the abused victims in melodrama are never quite so helpless as it might seem–they have their own hidden resources by which they foil their tormentors. And while we are outraged at the unjust sufferings of the oppressed, we applaud their ability to defy their persecutors. Tom may choose neither to fight or to flee, but he courageously stands up to Simon Legree by stubbornly refusing to do his bidding and beat his fellow slaves. Thus Tom shows impressive dignity and moral fortitude in his noncompliance with evil, enduring wrong rather than doing it. Tolstoi and Gandhi would admire such a stand and recognize its ethical force for effecting social change.

Stowe's Use of the Melodramatic Conventions

For the most part nineteenth-century melodramatists were content to dramatize evil of very limited scope, showing it as the consequence of the twisted psyches of certain malevolent individuals existing within an essentially benign society and universe. Harriet Beecher Stowe more daringly indicts an entire system. In revealing the oppression of blacks under slavery and the incipient revolt against such degradation, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* announces a vast moral struggle, whose end is the overturning of an iniquitous, but deeply entrenched institution. In this respect, Mrs. Stowe's didacticism is not so far removed from the commitment proposed by Imamu Baraka (LeRoi Jones), who has asserted that "The Revolutionary Theatre must Accuse and Attack . . . because it is a theatre of Victims."

Through a direct appeal to the heart, Harriet Beecher Stowe asks her audience to put themselves in the place of the victim: "If it were *your* Harry, mother, or your William, that were going to be torn from you by a brutal trader, tomorrow morning . . . " In the play as in the novel, the American public was for the first time asked to identify with black characters on the basis of a shared humanity and to espouse their cause.

But this unusual author goes further than simply tugging at our heart strings; she exposes the inner workings of the institution of slavery. Although it has been customary to make condescending remarks about Mrs. Stowe's naivete and sentimentality, to sneer at her ignorance of actual conditions in the South, and to complain of the racial stereotypes that *Uncle Tom* has given rise to, her intellectual insights into what maintains a system of dehumanizing tyranny are considerable. She may not have known much about individual blacks or plantation life, but the author of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* had a Calvinistic grasp of human weakness and a strong analytic mind. Consider three of her most penetrating observations in the novel, which are implied in the dramatic version even if not directly stated there. First axiom: Decent, respectable slaveholders are more harmful than all the Simon Legrees.

> "Granted," said the young man; "but, in my opinion, it is you considerate, humane men, that are responsible for all the brutality and outrage wrought by these wretches; because, if it were not for your sanction and influence, the whole system could not keep foothold for an hour. If there were no planters except such as that one . . . the whole thing would go down like a mill-stone. It is your respectability and humanity that licenses and protects his brutality."

The Bernard Shaw of *Widowers' Houses* and *Mrs. Warren's Profession* never stated more succinctly the link between decent society and vicious institutions. In fact, forty years later in *The Soul of Man Under Socialism* (1891) Oscar Wilde made the same paradoxical point: "The worse slave-owners were those who were kind to their slaves, and so prevented the horror of the system being realized by those who suffered from it and understood by those who contemplated it." Given Wilde's known tendency to appropriate, it is quite possible he borrowed this aphorism from *Uncle Tom.*

Mrs. Stowe is no less severe in her criticism of the pious–but hypocritical–Christian Northerner than of the humane Southern planter. Second axiom: When economics and morality clash, money overcomes principle.

> Brother B., being as we have said, a Christian man, and a resident in a free state, felt some uneasiness on the subject. He didn't like trading in slaves and souls of men,-of course, he didn't; but, then, there were thirty thousand dollars in the case, and that was rather too much money to be lost for a principle.

With the exception of the saintly Uncle Tom, the black victims of oppression on Legree's plantation are not idealized either. Twentieth-century concentration camps have shown us that those who are brutalized in turn brutalize others. Such is the case with Quimbo and Sambo, Legree's cruel black henchmen. Third axiom: Victims of tyranny are themselves corrupted and rendered tyrannical.

> It is a common remark, and one that is thought to militate strongly against the character of the race, that the negro overseer is always more tyrannical and cruel than the white one. This is simply to say that the negro mind has been more crushed and debased than the white. It is no more true of this race, than of every oppressed race, the world over. The slave is always a tyrant, if he can get a chance to be one.

Uncle Tom's Cabin and Religion

Mrs. Stowe's approach to the problem of evil is equally original. In both the fictional and stage versions, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* portrays a sinful world that seems to some of its most intelligent characters to have been abandoned by God and given over to the devil. *Uncle Tom* is a rare species–theological melodrama. Harriet Beecher Stowe, who had witnessed in her husband, the Reverend Calvin Stowe, a religious crisis of faith, gave her novel a metaphysical dimension by contrasting different ways in which the characters respond to the absence of God. Religious experience lies at the heart of all her preoccupations.

The two most reflective–and modern–characters in *Uncle Tom,* George Harris (in the novel he eventually goes to study in France and then "home" to Africa to find his roots) and Cassy (who as Legree's mistress on his decaying Faulknerian plantation discovers an existential hell) raise repeated questions about the possibility of belief in God in a dark unjust universe. In the novel, George tells Eliza, "I an't a Christian like you, Eliza; my heart is full of bitterness; I can't trust in God. Why does he let things be so?" Later he goes further, asking, "*Is* there a God to trust in?" In the stage version, these blasphemous doubts are somewhat abridged and attenuated to George's cry: "Eliza, my heart's full of bitterness. I can't trust in heaven. Why does it let things be so?" But in both novel and play, Cassy asserts of the Heavenly Father, "*He isn't here!* There's nothing here but sin, and long, long despair!" The fictional Cassy develops her questioning even more dangerously.

> "There's no use calling on the Lord,–he never hears," said the woman, steadily; "there isn't any God, I believe; or, if there is, he's taken sides against us. All goes against us, heaven and earth. Everything is pushing us into hell."

And George Harris echoes these sentiments, challenging the Christian God as a non-existent deity for blacks.

> "Oh, I've seen things all my life that have made me feel that there can't be a God. You Christians don't know how these things look to us. There's a God for you, but is there any for us?"

One of the most sympathetic whites in the novel, the ineffectual, guilt-ridden Augustine St. Clare, suffers a similar loss of faith and in despair turns to drink, because of the horror and hypocrisy that he has seen in a supposedly Christian society built on slavery and despotic cruelty. Mrs. Stowe attempted to counterbalance these harrowing doubts with affirmations of faith. Little Eva is, in her creator's words, "an impersonation in childish form of the love of Christ," and Uncle Tom is the bridegroom of this juvenile savior, who sits on his lap and lisps the Bible to him–surely one of the great romances of American literature. But by identifying with the oppressed blacks, whom she sees as feminine in warmth and sensibility, the novelist takes sides as a woman against God the Father, against the Founding Fathers who allowed slavery to exist, against the entire patriarchal world of slave-owning, slave tolerating injustice.

What reply can helpless victims make to a seemingly godless universe given over to evil? Tom's Christian submission and martyr-like death is contrasted (but not necessarily preferred) to George Harris's active rebellion and determined self-preservation. "I am desperate, I'll fight for my liberty, to the last breath I breathe!" George exclaims, disowning the United States as his country and its laws as binding on him: "Yes, sir; I've said 'master' for the last time to any man." Which set of beliefs will overcome evil: Tom's defense of faith in the Lord through self-sacrifice, or George's black-nationalist trust in his pistol and good aim? This central ethical and religious dilemma is never resolved in either the novel or the play.

Simon Legree, one of the true super villains of nineteenth-century literature, is above all a God-denying man. Unlike Mrs. Stowe's troubled doubters who wrestle with disbelief, this ex-pirate and former Yankee turned planter has hoped to supplant God. A direct descendant of the gothic tyrant, first developed by another woman novelist, Mrs. Anne Radcliffe, Legree is cravenly superstitious, tormented by conscience, and fearful of punishment. The brutal slave-driver grows terrified at the sight of the lock of hair that Little Eva has given Tom, because it reminds him of his mother's golden tresses. A degenerate son, Legree is haunted by the memory of his mother whom he violently spurned when she reproved his vices.

Harriet Beecher Stowe, who lost her mother when she was five and maintained a cult in her name thereafter, extols the maternal principle in *Uncle Tom's Cabin.* The more Legree feels cut off from the redemptive force of motherlove, the stronger is his desire to desecrate all the closest bonds of Christian living. He deliberately creates an unholy family, consisting of his slave-mistress, Cassy, whose marriage and motherhood he has sullied, and his two black overseers, Quimbo and Sambo, figurative children of his cruel tyranny.

Tom's purity of spirit fatally draws down Legree's satanic hatred. The slave-driver's persecution of Uncle Tom

is the inevitable consequence of evil's victimization of total innocence, a favorite theme in American literature that finds similar, if more complex treatment in Herman Melville's novella, *Billy Budd,* where the guiltless hero must also submit and die. At the end of Mrs. Stowe's novel, Legree—now a confirmed alcoholic—dies slowly of a bad conscience. His swearing and drinking, as well as his whoring, are natural attendants of mother-spurning.

In Aiken's dramatization, it is Legree who kills St. Clare, and he is shot in reprisal by Lawyer Marks. In other stage versions, Cassy stabs and kills her hated master and lover. The precise agency of Legree's dying matters little. Whatever the cause, the godless slave-driver dies a bad death, eternally damned, whereas Tom dies a beautifully edifying death, forgiving his tormentor as a model Christian gentleman should. The villain in melodrama is ultimately shown to be lonely, terror-stricken, and pathologically disturbed, while the victims of his persecution are revealed to be healthy and sound, strong in their faith and united with their fellow men by bonds of love. Such is the optimism of popular literature and drama.

CONSIDERING *UNCLE TOM'S CABIN* AS DRAMA

by Vera Jiji

Dramatizations of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* were based upon a 19th century novel, thus typically episodic and complex, involving over forty major characters (plus many minor ones), three major plot lines and three major different settings. The play versions were necessarily similarly episodic and lacking in unity, unless the adaptor omitted whole plots from his text. George Aiken's considerable talent lay in his ability to select his materials so that the essence of the novel's major concerns seems fairly well presented, though with the inevitable foreshortening, simplification, and elimination of introspective or abstract passages which the dramatic form dictates.

His dramatization's value can best be appreciated in comparison with others', such as the version by H.J. Conway which was used by Barnum and ended happily with a free Tom,[1] or the English version which completely omitted little Eva. When Mrs. Stowe at last tried her hand in the version she prepared for staged readings called *The Christian Slave,* she was far less successful in her dramatization than Aiken had been with his.

Aiken's play has four major movements. It originally ended with the death of little Eva, and was continued to the death of Uncle Tom by popular demand. The first section of the play deals mainly with George and Eliza, (although Tom is started on his journey South) as Eliza runs off to freedom in the North, to avoid the selling away from her of her little son, Harry. As each act is designed to end with a moment of high drama or tension, Act I ends with Eliza crossing the Ohio with her baby in her arms by jumping from one ice floe to the next—a desperate measure seen as the better alternative to losing her child to the slavers. (Interestingly, this seemingly most melodramatic of moments was based on an actual newspaper account of a woman who made just such an escape to freedom.)

Act II introduces us to Tom's sojourn in the benign care of Augustine St. Clare, an interesting character who understands all the evil of slavery, but cannot bestir himself to do anything about it, except to be an indulgent master to the few lucky enough to find themselves in his household. Here the novel allows for some interesting discussion between the Northern Ophelia who is a liberal in the abstract, while being a bit of a bigot in her own heart, and the ineffectual St. Clare whose only reason for living appears to be his love for his little daughter, Eva.

Her loving nature and true spirituality is matched by Tom's, as our commentators have noted. But in this section of the play, which moves back and forth between St. Clare's mansion and the escape to Canada of George and Eliza, the idyllic atmosphere is disturbed by the introduction of Topsy, the black who, "raised by a speculator with lots of others . . . never had no mother, nor father nor nobody" to love her. Eva's capacity to reach out to Topsy reforms the child.[2] More importantly, perhaps, the presence of Topsy allows the portrayal of a realistic adolescent, whose initiative serves only to get her into trouble, while her self-image as a "nigger," unlovable because of her color, allows for the creation of a complex character. For Topsy is certainly loveable, as attested to not only by the popularity of the character during the play's long period of production, but by our videotape. It is one thing to read the sentimental dialogue which leads to Topsy's promise to "try to be good." It's another thing entirely when the scene is enacted by two girls in the setting of the St. Clare garden. Unbelievable as the scene seems as written, it becomes fully credible in enactment.

Act II ends with the escape to Canada of George and Eliza, after an exciting series of entrapments and a dramatized

showdown at a "rocky pass." With their escape, the first major plot element is completed. Acts III and IV complete the St. Clare element, with the sequence of deaths of Eva (end Act III) and her father (end Act IV). Now Aiken introduces an element not present in the novel, as he takes Topsy up North as Ophelia's adopted daughter. An entirely new sub-plot is developed to create a comic contrast to the Legree section. As Tom is bought, an object worth $1200.00, Gumption Cute offers to "exhibit" Topsy as "The woolly gal," thus turning her back into an object. Act V continues the use of the comic sub-plot to contrast with and defuse the powerful and disturbing Legree scenes. Legree's first remark on reaching his plantation is "We're home." He soon follows up by asking Emmeline, the young girl he's bought as his sexual object, to "be a good girl." In this same scene, he flogs Tom to "within an inch of his life!"

Meanwhile, Topsy has a real home with Ophelia. The next to the last scene of Act V ends as Tom is being flogged, but Aiken does not end the act on this curtain—rather, the act ends after the next scene which closes with Topsy beating Gumption Cute about the room with a broom!

In Act VI, most of the loose threads of the novel are picked up, as the now grown up son of the planter who started all the trouble by selling Eliza's child, Harry, and Uncle Tom (George Shelby by name) returns to buy Tom back from Legree. With him come Marks (one of the slavers who had pursued Eliza) and Gumption Cute, who had, for the convenience of our adaptor, been present when Legree murdered St. Clare. Marks and Cute are prepared to blackmail Legree, but Marks kills him instead. If all this seems mighty contrived to you, you can be sure the audience did not mind a bit. Poetic justice is being served, and we are waiting to see Tom reunited in Heaven with Eva and St. Clare.

In the 1980's we tend to ridicule such scenes. Indeed, the history of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* as a drama got an added chapter in the 1970's with two new productions—one by a black playwright, Loften Mitchell, the other by the Trinity Square Repertory Company and rewritten by Adrian Hall in which the heaven scene was parodied. (So far as I can tell from reviews, the Mitchell version merely omitted the scene.) While it may seem ludicrous in the reading, again the spectacular element in the situation has a power of its own. I believe it is a fitting climax to what has been justifiably called a "theological drama."

As was the expected in 19th century America, our play combined, as a letter by adaptor H.J. Conway remarks, a "blending of the grave and the gay."[3] Just what the effect of emphasizing the humorous elements did to the work is a most complex and interesting question. What the effect is of putting the play "on its feet" in 1983, only our present audiences can tell.

George L. Aiken, Who Dramatized "Uncle Tom's Cabin," Played George Harris in the Original Cast

HUMOR AND *UNCLE TOM'S CABIN*

A very complex and interesting issued involved in our understanding of this play is the effect upon us of the preponderance of humor in a play which deals with so tragic a subject as slavery, and which compounds the sadness by its emphasis on the death of innocents. Of course, we know that genius never hesitates to mix genres: Shakespeare's tragedies are full of what we call "comic relief." The question is, what is the comedy relieving, and how does the use of comedy affect our response to the work as a whole?

This issue is too complex to deal with here, but it is evident that the play used humor to "detoxify," so to speak, its unspeakable subject matter.

Melodrama always thrives on villainy—Simon Legree, then, presented no real threat to the audience's equanimity. But the slave auction scene is another matter. Here was something most whites had not seen, and would find difficult to dismiss. In many versions of *Uncle Tom's Cabin,* the auction scene would begin with a dance by the blacks who are waiting to be sold! They sing, dance, shoot dice, have a chicken fight—just a bunch of happy darkies! We won't go into the psychology of despair, which might find interesting food for thought here. At any rate, this is the auction scene as it was performed in the New York Academy in 1901 by William Brady's production.

The scene as given here illustrates how variant versions, played over time, cheapened the value of *Uncle Tom's Cabin.*

A VARIANT VERSION OF THE AUCTION SCENE, WILLIAM BRADY PRODUCTION, NEW YORK ACADEMY, 1901. PRINTED FROM THE BRADY COLLECTION, BY PERMISSION OF THE MUSEUM OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Auctioneer - This ends the LaRouche lot.
(All Specialties at the beginning of the act.)

ACT IV

SCENE I: *An auction mart.*

DISCOVERED: *UNCLE TOM and EMMELINE at back. ADOLF, SKEGGS, MARKS, MANN and various spectators discovered.*

Haley - Hello Marks. What are you doing here?
Marks - To do some bidding at the sale.
Haley - Say Colonel. What is the next lot?
Colonel - The St. Clare lot.
Haley - (To Marks) is St. Clare dead?
Marks - Yes, he got into some trouble with Legree and Legree killed him.
(Enter Legree)
here he is now—
Haley - Hello Legree
Legree - (Crosses down to Auction Block) A Nigger with his boots blacked. Bah! Strip up your sleeves. (feels arms and muscles). Let's see your teeth. (to speculators) Likely looking Nigger.
(Crosses to Emmeline left)
(Turns to Emmeline)
You're a nice-looking girl enough.
(Grasps her arm)
Emmeline - (Shrieking)
Ah! you hurt me.
Colonel - (Business with mallet)
Stop that, you minx! no whimpering here.
Marks - (Tapping stage with umbrella)
Here, here no whimpering here—Don't make a fuss about it. You're to be sold, I can tell you that!

Colonel - (Rapping on desk)
Here, here, you keep quiet. I'll do all the talking here–
Marks - Well go on and talk–
Colonel - I intend to.
Marks - Well there ain't anybody stopping you
Colonel - Shut up! I will now commence this sale.
Marks - Why don't you start it? The sooner you start, the sooner we'll all get a chance to bid–
Colonel - Didn't I tell you to stop talking?
Marks - Do you own the place?
Colonel - I own most of it–
Marks - You ought to buy the rest and you would be sole proprietor.
Colonel - Keep quiet!
The first article I shall offer you today will be Adolf, valet to the late Mr. St. Clare. Adolf get on the stand.
(ADOLF does so)
Marks - (Goes to him examines his teeth–feels chest, arm, muscles, then retires Left)
Will you let me examine Adolphus?
Colonel - All right but be quick about it.
Marks - I didn't know whether you would or not, your so smart–owning the place.
(Business. Falls against block)
Here let me feel your muscle.
(Feels his arm, taps his chest)
open your mouth and let me see your teeth–
(ADOLF does so. MARKS unconsciously gets his finger in it, ADOLF closes down on it)
Here, here, hold on, hold on.
Haley - He is holding on.
Marks - Then let go. Well he has got good teeth!
(ADOLF does so)
(Cross Right)
(MR. STOCKWELL has his own business here, wait till he is well over in Right corner)
(All laugh)
Colonel - How much am I offered for Adolph?
Haley - $500.
Colonel - $500
(Each ad lib business)
Loker - $550.
(This scene is bid up to $875–Marks bid $75.)
Marks - $75.
(Work this scene as Mr. Stockwell directs–Adolf is finally knocked down to him for $875.00)
Colonel - Sold to - What's your name?
Marks - I'm a lawyer and my name is Marks.
Colonel - Adolph go to your Master
(Adolph gets off block)
Marks - Come here Adolf, you belong to me, wait till I get you home, I'll have your teeth pulled, you won't bite any more fingers, oh you wait.
(COLONEL has come down to Left of Marks and touches on shoulders)
Come on, come on can't see me?
(Marks chains hand)
Colonel - Come and settle!
Marks - Eh! what is it?
Colonel - Come settle.
Marks - Why certainly. Here hold that Adolf.
(Gives him umbrella)
I'll settle in just one minute. Don't think this is the only nigger I'm going to buy. I'll buy a whole bunch.
(Takes out large pocket book which is wound with long string)
(Business ad. lib. as Mr. Stockwell directs, till he gives Auctioneer money [sic])
Marks - Here's a dollar bill give me 25 cents change please.
Colonel - Haven't you made a mistake?
Marks - Is it a two dollar bill?
Colonel - How much did you bid for that nigger?
Marks - 75
Colonel - 75! 75! What!
Marks - Seventy five cents.
Colonel - That boy was knocked down for $875.
Marks - Well I've been knocked down for nothing many a time.
Colonel - And you will again if you don't get out of here. Take this money and get.
Marks - Well I am going to run
Colonel - (returns to desk)
Adolph get on the stand.
(ADOLF going to stand)
Marks - (Remembering his umbrella)
(Returns and gets umbrella)
(Exit Left/E)
Colonel - Mr. Haley, I'll have to hold you to your last bid, $850.00.
Haley - All right, I'll stand to it.
Colonel - $850, do I hear any more–$850 give me another bid–$850 once, twice and third time and sold to Mr. Haley. Adolf go to your master,
(Haley takes him)
(Adolf does so)
Now gentlemen I can offer you a first class article, Emmeline, take the stand, quadroon girl–eighteen years old, good house girl.
(EMMELINE on the stand)
Well now gentlemen, what am I bid?
Legree - $400.
Haley - $500.
Legree - $550.
Haley - $600.
Legree - $650.
Marks - (Enters Left/E)
75.
Colonel - Get out!
(Marks exits Left/E)
Legree - $700.
Marks - (Enters R. 1. E. and walks slowly on stage and exits L. 1. E. COLONEL comes from desk follows him ready to bounce him - but when he sees him go off - returns to desk)
Colonel - $700 and ad lib.
Loker - $750.
Marks - (Enters L. 1. E.)
75
Colonel - (Very angry comes down to him)
Didn't I tell you you couldn't bid here?
Marks - What am I doing here?
Colonel - What are you doing here?
Marks - Who are you?
Colonel - I'm the auctioneer.
Marks - How long have you been an auctioneer?
Colonel - About twenty years.
Marks - Why don't you change your business.
Colonel - That's none of your business.
15 **Marks -** Who am I?

Colonel - That's what I want to know. Who are you.

Marks - I'm a lawyer and my name is Marks.
(Stamps his umbrella down and leans on it. COLONEL kicks it from under him—he falls. COLONEL picks him up quick by collar of coat. Stand on picture.)

Colonel - Didn't I tell you five minutes ago you couldn't bid here?

Marks - No Sir!

Colonel - Yes Sir!

Marks - That wasn't any more than three minutes ago.
(Business of clapping hand and going to fight)

Colonel - Three or five, you can't bid here.

Marks - Likely I can.

Colonel - Didn't I tell you, you can't bid here?

Marks - I say I can.

Colonel - I say you can't.

Marks - Yes sir I can.

Colonel - Well what will you bid.

Marks - I can bid you good day.
(Exits L. 1. E.)

Colonel - (Returns to desk)
750 and ad lib.

Legree - 800.

Colonel - Eight, eight, no more, eight, one, two, three and sold to Mr. Legree. Emmeline go to your master, next I shall offer you the valuable article known as Uncle Tom,
(Uncle Tom enters)
the most useful nigger ever raised.
(Uncle Tom takes the stand)
Gentlemen in want of an overseer. now is the time to bid.

Legree - (Business Goes over to Uncle Tom, looks at teeth and feels muscles)
Where were you raised?

Tom - In Kentuck Masa.

Legree - What have you done?

Tom - Had care of Massa's farm.

Legree - That's a likely nigger story.
(Business as before.)
(Auctioneer works this up as before act)

Colonel - Now Gentlemen make me a bid!
(Bids on Uncle Tom as follows—400—500—600—

Legree - $800.

—— $900;

Colonel - Why Gentlemen you wouldn't let a valuable piece of property like this go for a mere trifle —Where's that man from Mobile who wanted to give $1500 for a good overseer! Changed his mind?

Haley - Guess he's gone home.

Skinner - You can buy the city of Mobile for that.
(The Sale continues)

Colonel - $900 (and ad lib)

—— $1000

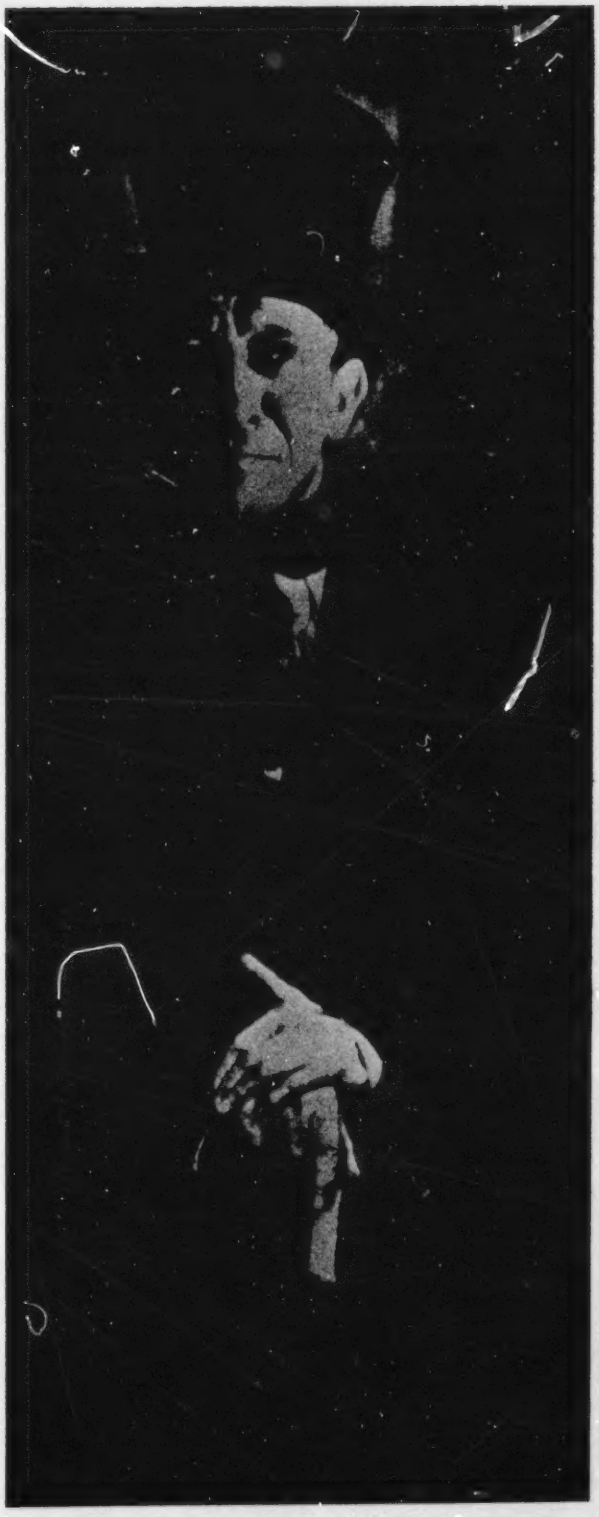
—— $1100

Legree - (Right)
$1200

Colonel - $1200 (ad lib) third and last time. Sold to—

Legree - Simon Legree!

Uncle Tom - (Center)
The Lord have mercy on our souls.
(Curtain—down 3 minutes)



Lawyer Marks

AN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

by Florence Polatnick

Scholars of American literature and historians of the nineteenth century disagree as to the short and long range effects of *Uncle Tom's Cabin,* but they agree unanimously that it is unparalleled as a piece of successful propaganda.

The work began modestly enough as a serial in *The National Era,* an antislavery weekly. Each edition of the newspaper was eagerly awaited. Tattered copies were passed from hand to hand until they fell apart. The following March, the book was published.[1]

The Novel's Reception

Hot off the press, the book was a sensation. It sold out its first edition of 5,000 copies in less than two days.[2] A new printing was ordered; eight presses ran day and night for one year to keep up with the demand.[3] Some 300,000 copies were sold in the first year.[4] In all it is estimated that about three million copies have been sold in the United States.[5] The book undoubtedly reached every literate family in the North, and, as Lader points out, the children who heard it read around the fire at night were the voters of 1860 and the soldiers of 1861.[6]

The impact was no less phenomenal overseas. Outstanding literary lights reviewed *Uncle Tom's Cabin*—Thomas Macaulay, George Sand, Heinrich Heine. Three Paris newspapers simultaneously ran installments.[7] In Germany alone seventy-five different editions were published.[8] The Italian public gobbled up *Il Zio Tom* despite its having been banned by the Pope.[9] Russian censors also outlawed the book, but Tolstoy obtained a copy. It reportedly made such an impression on him that he ranked Mrs. Stowe as one of the all-time literary greats, along with Dostoyevsky and Victor Hugo.[10]

All over Europe there sprang up restaurants, creameries, and shops based on an Uncle Tom theme.[11] The book was translated into some forty different languages and dialects, including Siamese. In all of history, only the Bible has appeared in so many different versions.

By far the most significant impact was felt in England. Within one year forty pirated editions were printed in the United Kingdom and its colonies.[12] In all, the best guess puts the total of copies sold in the United Kingdom and its colonies at one and a half million. The Prime Minister, Lord Palmerston, is said to have read *Uncle Tom's Cabin* three times.[13] Lader informs us that Queen Victoria and Prince Albert had been considering closing the Canadian border to runaway slaves but were so affected by the book that they reversed themselves.[14] When in 1853, 500,000 signed the "Affectionate and Christian Address of British Women to their Sisters, the Women of the United States of America"– a petition to abolish slavery–[15] it was presented to Mrs. Stowe as the outstanding anti-slavery figure in this country.

Some scholars credit Harriet Beecher Stowe with an even greater influence on the course of British-American relations during the Civil War. English economic interests were clearly favorable to the South. The English purchased the Southerners' tobacco and cotton. Confederate gunboats were being built in British shipyards. The economic argument was then dressed up in political casuistry; British newspapers argued that the Southern states had as much right to rebel as the original thirteen colonies.[16] Parliament was considering granting official recognition to the Confederate States of America when Mrs. Stowe decided to answer the "Affectionate and Christian" anti-slavery petition she had received ten years earlier from the women of England. Since her response followed closely her visit to the White House, it is believed that the two events are connected. Mrs. Stowe made an eloquent appeal for British support of those forces that were working for the abolition of slavery, i.e., the Northern states, and cleverly closed with a sentence lifted from the original: "We appeal to you as sisters, as wives, and as mothers, to raise your voices to your fellow citizens, and your prayers to God, for the removal of this affliction and disgrace from the Christian world."[17] Some historians do not believe that her "Reply" had much effect. Nevertheless, it bolstered the moral forces urging England to stand by its anti-slavery principles. Recognition and aid to the Confederate States was never granted.

The Slavery Issue: 1787-1850

To what can we attribute Mrs. Stowe's phenomenal success? First, the nation had been moving inexorably toward a showdown between the North and the South. Even before the Constitution was adopted, the Northwest Ordinance of 1787 prohibited slavery in the territory north of the Ohio River between the Mississippi and the Appalachians. Two years later the writers of the Constitution could not get the Southern states–Georgia and South Carolina in particular–to join the Union without serious concessions concerning slavery, although the word itself was never used. A number equal to three-fifths of the slave population was added to white Southern delegations in the House of Representatives. Increased representation also gave the slave states an advantage in the electoral College.

Since Northern shipowners and merchants had a heavy stake in the slave trade and in the products produced by slaves, they granted another concession to the slave states: instead of immediately outlawing the slave trade, the cutoff was postponed until 1808.

After the formation of the union, sectional interests continued to force compromises with slavery. When Missouri applied for admission to the Union as a slave state, some heavy "logrolling" by representatives of Southern planters and Northern manufacturing and shipping interests resulted in the Compromise of 1820. Maine, its territory detached from Massachusetts, was admitted as a free state, Missouri as a slave state. In addition, a line was drawn across the remainder of the Louisiana Territory. South of the boundary, slavery would be permitted.

As the fever of "Manifest Destiny" gripped the nation–that supposedly divinely inspired mandate to stretch the Stars and Stripes from ocean to ocean, the unsuccessful campaigns to conquer Canada in both the Revolution and the War of 1812 discouraged expansionists from looking to the North. However, a war with Spain added Florida. Mexico's attempt to outlaw slavery in Texas resulted in a United States invasion and annexation of half of our southern neighbor's territory. Many abolitionists decried the use of national policy to enlarge the power and enrich the pockets of the slaveholders.

Meanwhile, the South almost seceded over the tariff issue in 1828 and again in 1832. Believing that the plantation system could not make profits with free labor, the South pressed for guarantees of the continuation of slavery. As time went by, these deep rifts were patched over with a series of make-shift compromises.

The Compromise of 1850

Another breaking point occurred in 1850. Gold was discovered in California in 1848, and within a year there was enough population for the territory to claim statehood. Most of the settlers were from the North, but admission of California to the Union as a free state would have upset the delicate balance in Congress. Anti-slavery forces were at the same time hammering away at a national disgrace–slave auctions in the District of Columbia practically in the shadow of the Capitol.

Illustrations of the American Anti-Slavery Almanac for 1840

Servility of the Northern States in arresting and returning fugitive Slaves.

Hunting Slaves with dogs and guns. A Slave drowned by the dogs.

The Compromise of 1850 allowed California to enter as a free state. The public sale of slaves in the capital was abolished. But in return for these concessions the South demanded a heavy price. They insisted that the states to be carved out of the remainder of the Mexican Cession would decide the slavery issue for themselves on the basis of "squatter sovereignty," thus allowing the settlers with slaves to move in and dominate the ultimate decision. The Federal government had to assume the debt of Texas during its ten year nationhood, and the Southerners finally secured a Fugitive Slave Law with teeth. The provisions of this Fugitive Slave Act outraged even moderates on the slavery question. It violated the most basic guarantees of the Constitution and fundamentals of American law. Specifically appointed Federal Commissioners would make a decision solely on the basis of affidavits presented by the owner of the suspected escapee. The accused was not permitted a hearing or a jury trial, and his/her testimony was not admissible. There was no provision for a stay or an appeal. The Federal Commissioner was paid ten dollars for each person returned to the slave owner, but only five dollars if he decided to free the accused. Even worse, every citizen was turned into a potential slave catcher because the Federal Commissioner could call on any bystander for aid. A marshal or deputy refusing to make an arrest was fined $1,000, no small sum in those days. The same penalty plus six months in jail covered anyone concealing or rescuing a fugitive. In addition, the slave owners could institute civil damage suits for each slave lost. Also troublesome was the *ex post facto* nature of the law; those former slaves who had escaped and lived as free Negroes for years faced possible return to bondage. Even those born free felt the danger. The Compromise of 1850 had given the South an unrestricted hunting license in the Northern states. Despite the efforts of Daniel Webster and Henry Clay to preserve the Union with elaborate appeasements, the political stage was set for the fantastic reception of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.

The Abolitionist Movement

A second reason for the novel's success was that the public conscience had been prepared by long years of abolitionist activity. Twenty years had passed since William Lloyd Garrison put out the first issue of *The Liberator* for the express purpose that "every chain be broken and every bondsman set free." Despite poverty, social ostracism, insults, threats, near-lynchings, he proclaimed, "I will not retreat an inch—AND I WILL BE HEARD!"[18]

Another strong voice was that of Mrs. Lydia Maria Child, the best-selling author in the United States with her books of "how-to" guidance, *The Frugal Housewife, The Mother's Book, The Little Girl's Own Book*. In 1833 she issued *An Appeal in Favor of That Class of Americans Called Africans!* The South reacted by public burnings of her blameless household books and by sending vitriolic letters. However, in her hometown of Boston she was met with stony silence. The fortunes of many of the "best" families were directly or indirectly tied to slavery. Disapproval was expressed by an act, the severity of which can only be appreciated by those familiar with Boston—Mrs. Child's free card to the Athanaeum was withdrawn.

Another activist, Theodore Weld, wrote many articles, pamphlets, and books as leader of the American Anti-Slavery Society. In 1839 he published *Slavery As It Is*. It became the Bible of the abolitionist movement. Harriet Beecher Stowe was supposed to have kept Weld's book in her workbasket by day and under her pillow at night.[19] A number of incidents described in this abolitionist's handbook were made part of the plot of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*—e.g., the whipping of George Harris by the child of his white master.[20] Many historians believe Weld's book has not been sufficiently appreciated as a major factor in influencing public opinion. In its first year alone *Slavery As It Is* sold 100,000 copies.[21] Weld was also assistant to John Quincy Adams in the campaign to present thousands of petitions against slavery on the floor of the House of Representatives. After being denied a second term in the Presidency in 1828, Adams returned to Washington as a Massachusetts Congressman from 1831 to 1848. He became the main Congressional spokesman for the abolitionist movement. Adams would not allow the slavery issue to be buried. He exhorted, provoked, forced debates; and when the opposition tried to shut him up by parliamentary maneuvering, he defied the Gag Rule and continued to introduce the petitions containing thousands of signatures gathered by Weld and his colleagues in the American Anti-Slavery Society.

Slave Narratives

For many years before Harriet Beecher Stowe was inspired to contribute to the growing mountain of abolitionist literature, poetry and narratives by former slaves had continued to make a deep impression on the public. Weld's group and others maintained schools for the education of free Negroes,[22] many of the teachers having originally come from Lyman Beecher's Cincinnati theological school. Abolitionists wanted blacks to write their own stories so that they would ring true and would contradict the myth of Negro mental inferiority.[23] However, for those who were illiterate, ghost writers filled in. They were often important literary figures or scholars—e.g., John Greenleaf Whittier, Lydia Maria Child, Edmund Quincy. So that by the time Mrs. Stowe launched her attack on "this horror, this nightmare abomination!", many Northerners were familiar with the miserable details of plantation life from the slave narratives that had been condensed or fully serialized in their newspapers and magazines.

The best known of the antebellum biographies of escaped slaves is *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* published in 1845 from which Mrs. Stowe borrowed.[24] Douglass continued to write books and published a newspaper which had wide circulation. In addition, he was a first-rate public speaker and was often featured at abolitionist rallies.

Another outstanding black author was William Wells Brown. During his flight from Kentucky, William "no second name" was helped by Wells Brown. The escapee took the name of and dedicated his first book to the Quaker "conductor" on the Underground Railroad to whom he owed so much. The first Negro seriously to attempt such literary forms as the novel, drama, and travel literature, he was also responsible for the best of the songbooks of the abolitionist movement, *The Anti-Slavery Harp*, which contained verses sung to familiar tunes like "Auld Lang Syne." Like Douglass, he was a major attraction on the Northern lecture circuit.[25] (See article in this sourcebook.)

Another important lecturer was Henry Bibb, who had escaped from Kentucky across the river to Cincinnati in 1837.[26] Returning for his wife, he was caught, but escaped again. By all accounts, Bibb was able to wring the hearts of audiences who came to hear his descriptions of the whippings, the miscegenation, babies being torn from their mothers' breasts, husbands and wives separated, and all the other abominations of the slave auctions. Bibb, like many other blacks in the North, fled to Canada after the passage of the Fugitive Slave Law, but he remained active in the cause.

Scholars specializing in this phase of our country's history have brought to public attention many other ante-bellum black authors. Biographies, poetry, essays, newspaper accounts, pamphlets, sermons, and speeches had been contributed by both black and white authors. There was an 1834 novel by Richard Hildreth, *The Slave: or, Memoirs of Archy Moore,* and even two plays–*The Branded Hand* in 1845 and *Warren* in 1850.[27] Suffice to say, the message had been drummed into the public's mind over many years, and as a result, Harriet Beecher Stowe's vast audience had been conditioned for acceptance. But *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was the spark that lit the fire.

Didacticism and the Historical Novel

Mrs. Stowe's book is a historical novel in the tradition of an author she and most others in the nineteenth century much admired–Sir Walter Scott. It is Dickensian in its wide-ranging survey of everyday life of ordinary people and its sharp observations on the relationships of social classes. An entire civilization–wayside inns, riverboats, slave markets, the range of homes from St. Clare's estate to the less luxurious Shelby plantation, to the horrible Legree farm, to the modest Quaker homes, to Miss Ophelia's proper New England establishment, to the poor slave quarters–was detailed in its scope. Many Europeans made their acquaintance with America only through its pages. The novel gave the impression of authenticity. In fact, after the inflamed Southern counter-attack, Mrs. Stowe painstakingly documented her sources a year later in *The Key to Uncle Tom.* She cited her experiences during eighteen years in Cincinnati, court records, handbills, advertisements, newspaper reports, and eyewitness accounts like that of Josiah Henson, a former slave whose 1849 narrative she had read, whom she had met at her brother's home, and who some scholars believe, became the model for Uncle Tom.[28] The minor characters, most of whom are slaves, cover a full range of emotions–joy, love, sorrow, pride, weakness–all human qualities denied by the concept of chattel slavery. The examples of Eliza and George Harris, Aunt Chloe, and, of course, Uncle Tom gave a dimension to the sin of slavery that the abolitionists' pamphlets and speeches never could.

The 19th Century Religious Revival

Another great social movement in the mid-nineteenth century joined the inexorable flow toward civil war–i.e., an intense religious revival in America. In addition, new creeds like Unitarianism and Mormonism were spreading their beliefs and provoking counter-movements. Evangelism was popular, particularly on the newly settled frontier. We must never forget that Mrs. Stowe's life was permeated with religion. She was steeped in the Calvinist tradition of Jonathan Edwards. Along with many others, Harriet Beecher Stowe had been nurtured on a theory of history derived from Cotton Mather.[29] God had reserved America for the founding of Christ's Commonwealth, he wrote in his *Magnalia Christi Americana.* The Puritan Fathers were giants predestined to lead their saintly flocks into the wilderness, sustained by God's grace. The leaders of the Massachusetts Bay Colony were held up as heroic models for later generations to follow. "What wonderful stories those! . . .made me feel the very ground I trod to be consecrated . . ." Mrs. Stowe wrote in her autobiographical notes.[30] She felt that *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and her later slave novel *Dred* were historical in nature. Today historians try to present the facts of the past in an unbiased, non-prejudicial way. Not so Mrs. Stowe. She was writing a didactic book, documenting "the peculiar institution" of American slavery to force recognition of its evil sin so that the nation could cleanse itself and get back on the track of the Divine Plan.

American Messianism

In *The Flowering of New England* Van Wyck Brooks quotes an 1853 letter by Mrs. Stowe: " . . .the whole world looks hopefully toward America as a nation especially raised by God to advance the cause of human liberty and religion . . ."[31] And so when we read that Mrs. Stowe told people that God was the actual author of *Uncle Tom's Cabin,* that He had only used her as an instrument, we cannot dismiss her as a fanatic. Most people of her era thought in religious terms. The concepts of guilt, damnation, redemption were very much on people's minds in the 1850's. So that, again, Harriet Beecher Stowe stood in the mainstream of American popular opinion.

The student who reads *about* Harriet Beecher Stowe before actually tackling the novel will be led to expect a call to arms and is disappointed to find no such revolutionary message. In fact, Mrs. Stowe was surprised at the fervor with which the abolitionists took up her book; she had thought it too mild for them.[32]

She believed that true Christian love, after the model of Uncle Tom, would solve all the problems. Just as Tom forgave his tormentors, she did not blame the South for the evils of slavery. It was the system itself that was at fault. In fact, two Southern whites, Mrs. Shelby and St. Clare are anti-slavery Southerners. The villain Simon Legree is a transplanted Yankee. Like many of the early abolitionists, Mrs. Stowe was a gradualist. She believed that the United States of America was chosen by God to be a citadel of liberty and that the struggle to free the slaves was a continuation of the upward movement toward equality, a fulfillment of the philosophy of the Founding Fathers. Moreover, she was certain that when Southerners realized that slavery is a sin for which God would eventually exact retribution, they would gradually free their bondsmen. Meanwhile, she insisted, the clergy must cease their hypocritical silence, must thunder their disapproval in the tradition of Calvin and Knox.

Her conclusion to *Uncle Tom's Cabin* sums it all up: "A day of grace is yet held out to us. Both North and South have been guilty before God; and the *Christian Church* has a heavy account to answer. Not by combining together to protect injustice and cruelty, and making a common capital of sin, is this Union to be saved–but by repentance, justice, and mercy; for not surer is the eternal law by which the millstone sinks in the ocean, than that stronger law by which injustice and cruelty shall bring on nations the wrath of Almighty God!"[33]

Stowe's Political Views

Mrs. Stowe supported the American Anti-Slavery Society's program of sit-ins, economic and social boycotts, non-cooperation with government, refusal to obey unjust laws, and non-violent harassment and interference with slave-catchers. She approved of efforts like those of her beloved brother Henry Ward Beecher, who held "benevolent" slave auctions to raise money among his Brooklyn parishioners to buy slaves and free them.[34] She was sensitive enough to the rights of property to realize that compensation must be offered to slaveholders for their losses.

But once the blacks became free–then what? They must be protected, Mrs. Stowe said, for the former slaves would be weak and simple. Whites would have to use their superior strength and knowledge to educate and uplift the downtrodden. If only every Topsy could be put in the care of a Miss Ophelia, the blacks would be raised up to become self-reliant citizens, thoughtful voters, responsible legislators.

The fact is Mrs. Stowe had little first hand knowledge of slavery. From her vantage point during the Cincinnati years she saw many auctions, her family helped escapees, she had

even made a brief sojourn to visit a plantation on the Kentucky side of the river. Her brother had spent time in New Orleans and had reported his observations and impressions. However, the escaped slaves she encountered were almost all from the border states where they tended to be more sophisticated and often educated. Many, like Frederick Douglass, lived in urban settings and were skilled artisans. Another group of blacks whom she knew were the speakers at abolitionist meetings, writers, preachers. These were hardly representative of the mass of "cotton choppers" in Alabama or Mississippi or the slaves such as those living in sub-human conditions on Sea Island, Georgia described by Fanny Kemble.

In her ingenuous innocence Mrs. Stowe believed that one generation of education and liberty would be enough to wipe out the lingering stain of slavery.[35] It was this kind of naive optimism and lack of understanding of the deep psychological and cultural gulf that blacks had to bridge that doomed Reconstruction and set back the cause of true equality.

Another solution favored by Mrs. Stowe was sending blacks back to Africa. It was for this purpose the American Colonization Society was formed in 1816. The main argument was that for many reasons, not necessarily their fault, Negroes were destined to fail as free men in white America, and that they were better off among their own kind. Humane reformers, mostly Quakers, would buy freedom for the slaves, provide them with farm equipment, tools, animals, etc., and ship them to West Africa. Not only would Negroes be free, but they would carry the Christian religion, for which it was thought they had a special affinity, as missionaries to the heathens of their own race.

Most free blacks opposed this scheme. First, they refused to abandon their chained bretheren and the possible help they could offer them.[36] Second, they pointed out, they were native-born Americans. They had been cut off from their African heritage. For them Africa was exile.

In *Uncle Tom's Cabin* Mrs. Stowe sent the Harris family on to Africa after their successful escape to Canada. A prominent Negro leader of the time, George T. Downing, pointed out that George Harris, the only black in the novel who "really betrays any other than the subservient, submissive Uncle Tom spirit, which has been the cause of so much disrespect felt for the colored man," is left in Liberia.[37] In *Black Abolitionists* Quarles cites Mrs. Stowe to the effect that if she had it to do over, she would not have sent George Harris to Liberia.[38]

Stowe's Views After 1852

Some of Mrs. Stowe's ideas changed between *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and the publication of *Dred: A Tale of the Great Dismal Swamp* in 1856. What happened in the five year interval? 1854 was a watershed year. Stephen A. Douglas, Democratic Senator from Illinois, had reopened the raw wound of the slavery debate by introducing the Kansas-Nebraska Bill. Its provisions repealed the boundary line dividing slave and free states as laid down by the Missouri Compromise of 1820. Douglas proposed two future states to be carved out of the Louisiana Territory—Kansas and Nebraska—in which settlers could decide the slavery issue for themselves. Douglas dressed up this old principle of "squatter sovereignty" as support for popular self-government. The more cynical historians believed he was motivated less by his regard for Jeffersonian ideals than by his need for Southern support for his Presidential bid and his interest in a transcontinental railroad running along the central route.

As soon as the law was passed, settlers quickly poured into the Kansas Territory. Numbers were important in order to control the territorial legislature, and many pro-slavers temporarily crossed over from Missouri so that they could vote. Violence escalated, and heretofore pacifist abolitionist groups began to collect money to arm the "free soilers." Mrs. Stowe's brother Henry was active in this campaign; in fact, the rifles sent West were called "Beecher's Bibles." As the nation watched, "Bleeding Kansas" provided an ominous preview of the coming war between the states.

In the same year, after Senator Charles Sumner of Massachusetts excoriated his colleague Andrew Butler of South Carolina, he was almost beaten to death on the Senate floor by Representative Preston Brooks, a relative of Butler. The House refused to censure the attacker. Three days later, back in Kansas, John Brown led a raid in which five pro-slavery men were murdered.

Another 1854 event which greatly influenced Mrs. Stowe was the formation of the Republican Party, a patchwork of Northern anti-slavery Whigs, anti-slavery Democrats, and Free Soilers. They were dedicated to resisting the extension of slavery. John C. Fremont, their first Presidential candidate, the Pathfinder of the West, the hero of California, was the kind of candidate Mrs. Stowe could support.

It was these fast-moving events that caused Mrs. Stowe to change direction in the middle of writing *Dred*. Although she still appealed to humanitarian and Christian pacificism as exemplified by the educated, generous heroine and the serious young lawyer working to raise up the Negro, she also made much of the economic argument against slavery—Yankee thrift under free labor as superior to the inefficiencies and corrupting influence of the plantation system. Although she still believed the best solution was gradual emancipation after a paternalistic, educational process, the plot veered off midway in the book, as if she suddenly saw that it was no longer possible for Northerners and Southerners of good will to effect a reconciliation. She had decided, as indeed most people had, that the conflict between the North and the South was now inevitable. The hero became an escaped slave modeled after Nat Turner, who had led a rebellion in 1831. Dred talks like the kind of preacher Mrs. Stowe admired, spewing righteous wrath, like a prophet in the Old Testament.[39]

Mrs. Stowe's solutions to the problem of slavery were not the resounding success that should have crowned such earnest effort and widespread circulation. The spirit of Christian love did not seem to energize many Southerners to free their slaves voluntarily—or even to accept compensation for so doing. Most Christian ministers continued to reflect the attitudes of their flocks rather than reshape them into a rejection of the sin of slavery. Freed blacks went to Canada in greater numbers after the Fugitive Slave Law, but emigration to Africa lagged.

Uncle Tom's Cabin certainly did not cause the Civil War, but Mrs. Stowe supplied the moral indignation that made the North secure in the feeling that God was on their side. Just as we "know" the ancient Greeks from the writing of Homer, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, this "Iliad of the Blacks,"[40] is responsible for molding attitudes about Southerners and blacks that persist even until this day.

Popular Reactions to *Uncle Tom's Cabin*

Furnas attacks Harriet Beecher Stowe by summing up some of the misunderstandings the "unwary" reader will carry away: "Slaveowners are (or were) snarling brutes of paranoid tendency and criminal background. Slaves themselves, when markedly of 'African race,' are either gentle and pellucidly Christian or diabolically brutalized. When markedly tinged with 'white blood,' they are far more intelligent, enterprising and sensitive and show it by running away in great numbers. Slave women usually run away either because their children have been sold away from them or because master has assailed their virtue. Northerners are much to blame for an un-Christian repugnance toward Negroes, for black skins contain souls of which Heaven is solicitous.

But one must not expect full intelligence and refinement from many members of the innately handicapped 'African race,' a term that can dispense with definition since everybody knows more or less what it means . . ."[41]

The Play Distorted

What followed was even more dismaying. Like windblown seeds the Uncle Tom plays sprang up everywhere in the United States and Europe. This phenomenon of the Uncle Tom plays and their distortions for the purposes of spectacle, drama, and humor are detailed elsewhere in this sourcebook, but in assessing the long-range historical effects we must note that these plays not only perpetuated Mrs. Stowe's unfortunate misconceptions about blacks, they twisted them into cruel and dangerous new shapes.

A typical bill poster scene

In one version black characters jigged and played the banjo in the big slave auction scene—happy darkies! Another introduced "The Quadroon Lady's Maid Burlesque Pas de Trois."[42] The role of Topsy expanded because of the possibility of introducing humor and hijinks. Uncle Tom often did cakewalks and sang popular "coon songs."

Revived after the Civil War, these plays swept the country like prarie fires. By the late 1870's the presentations were a combination minstrel show and circus. Because of the lack of recreational opportunity in the Bible Belt, the greatest impact came in the small towns and isolated hamlets. Where there was no auditorium, tents were set up. People could go to see an Uncle Tom show and not be considered sinful. Unfortunately, their minds were being filled with the harmful stereotypes which are still alive today.

Too many historians concentrate on the facts, the documented events, and the reality and overlook what is gradually happening in people's minds. Victor Hugo wrote, "An invasion of armies can be resisted but not an idea whose time has come." Harriet Beecher Stowe's idea in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was to put a human face on slavery so that objective analysis was swept away by moral indignation. The ground had been well plowed and enriched by many abolitionist authors, both black and white, poets, lecturers, lobbyists, so that the seed she planted sprouted vigorously. Perhaps Lincoln was making a wry exaggeration when he credited Mrs. Stowe with starting the Civil War, but it was his way of acknowledging *Uncle Tom's Cabin* as one of the most powerful pieces of propaganda of all times, the good and bad effects of which continue to shade national and international attitudes even today.

THE CASE AGAINST *UNCLE TOM'S CABIN*

by Errol Hill

This article is somewhat condensed from its original version.

A Recent Story

In September, 1945, a musical version of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was banned in Bridgeport and New Haven, Connecticut. The showings had been vigorously denounced by a combined group of union leaders, clergymen, and black spokesmen who felt that the play ridiculed black people of an earlier time and that its performance would provoke racial animosity. It took a protest from the American Civil Liberties Union to allow the performance to continue under peaceful picketing.[1]

Early Responses

These protests by responsible spokesmen for Afro-Americans might seem curious to anyone acquainted with the stage history of *Uncle Tom's Cabin.* For some ninety years, from 1852 to the 1940s, the play had been consistently performed throughout the United States. Different versions of the play had also been staged in many foreign countries with, for instance, five London theatres presenting it concurrently in 1878 and each making a profit. Moreover, like the novel on which it was based, the play was originally hailed as a vivid indictment of slavery, one that could only help create the climate for the eventual freeing of all slaves. How was it, then, that black leaders in 1945 could denounce *Uncle Tom's Cabin* as a slander on their race?

Black Leaders' Endorsements: F. Douglass

There is no question of Harriet Beecher Stowe's intentions in writing her celebrated novel. As she wrote in the preface to the novel: "The object of these sketches is to awaken sympathy and feeling for the African race as they exist among us, to show their wrongs and sorrows, under a system so necessarily cruel and unjust . . . What may be gathered of the evils of slavery from sketches like these, is not the half that could be told of the unspeakable whole." Her book was instantly as popular as it was controversial. It was vehemently attacked by the pro-slavery forces and just as fiercely defended by the abolitionists.[2] Black leaders of the period were strong in their endorsement of the novel. The Colored National Convention of 1853, led by Frederick Douglass called the book "plainly marked by the finger of God."[3] Douglass himself, an escaped slave and a renowned spokesman in the cause of black liberation, visited Mrs. Stowe in 1853 to enlist her aid for his plan to establish an industrial school for black youths. Although her promised support was later withdrawn, Douglass praised her novel. Speaking to an assembly of anti-slavery groups he said:

> One flash from the heart-supplied intellect of Harriet Beecher Stowe could light a million camp fires in front of the embattled host of slavery, which not all the waters of the Mississippi, mingled as they are with blood, could extinguish.[4]

W. W. Brown

Another runaway slave who joined the ranks of those working for emancipation was William Wells Brown. Completely self-taught, Brown was an eloquent platform speaker, essayist, novelist and dramatist. His play, *The Escape,* or, *A Leap for Freedom* (1858), is the earliest surviving drama by a black writer and the most authentic account in play form of the life of a slave. A world traveller, Brown was present at a bumper anti-slavery meeting held in London, on May 16, 1853. Five thousand Britishers attended, many of whom were drawn to the meeting by the presence of Mrs. Stowe herself. Next morning. Brown wrote to his friend, William Lloyd Garrison, the abolitionist editor of *The Liberator,* reporting:

> No time could possibly have been more appropriate for such a meeting than the present. *Uncle Tom's Cabin* has come down upon the dark abodes of slavery like a morning's sunlight, unfolding to view its enormities in a manner which has fastened all eyes upon the "peculiar institution," and awakening sympathy in hearts that never before felt for the slave.[5]

The life stories of runaway slaves, graphic in their portrayal of life on the southern plantations and epic in their descriptions of escape and pursuit, were written down, published and read with eagerness by a curious and receptive northern public. Mrs. Stowe was familiar with these narratives which she praised for their candor and originality. Since her actual experience of slave conditions was limited, she relied on such accounts for information that she incorporated in her book. This circumstance has led one recent critic to theorize that if indeed Mrs. Stowe was the little lady who started the big war that freed the slaves, a large part of the credit should go to the slave narratives that had provided her with material and had in fact prepared the reading public for both her novel and the upheaval that followed its appearance.[6]

J. Henson

Josiah Henson was one of the escapees who capitalized on Mrs. Stowe's creation of the character of Uncle Tom. Henson, who became a pastor in Canada, had in 1849 written a short account of his struggle for freedom. After the enormous success of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, he rewrote and expanded his little book, claiming to be the original Uncle Tom. He even persuaded Mrs. Stowe to contribute a preface to the 1858 edition and he used his acquired celebrity to raise funds for a school for escaped slaves. Some years later Henson was granted an audience with Queen Victoria on the strength of his identification with the fictional Uncle Tom.

P.C. Dunbar

Clearly, the initial reaction of black leaders to Mrs. Stowe's book was highly favorable. Their immediate, imperative concern was the end of slavery. By focusing world-wide attention on the evils of that institution, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was instrumental in galvanizing strong support for its abolition. Blacks were enormously grateful to the courageous author of this powerful novel. As late as 1899, Paul Laurence Dunbar, recognized as the first poet of his race, wrote a sonnet to Mrs. Stowe:

> She told the story and the whole world wept
> At wrongs and cruelties it had not known
> But for this fearless woman's voice alone.
> She spoke to consciences that long had slept . . .
> Blest be the hand that dared be strong to save,
> And blest be she who in our weakness came:
> Prophet and priestess! At one stroke she gave
> A race to freedom and herself to fame.[7]

It was inevitable that such a novel would soon find itself translated to the stage. From the time of the Greeks, audiences have shown themselves partial to watching familiar events re-enacted in the theatre. To read about them in print might stir minds to ponder their meaning, but to see these events bodied forth in flesh and blood before a public audience could arouse emotions to a call for action. In mid-nineteenth century America, however, "theatre" was a disreputable word. Puritanical circles, from which many anti-slavery advocates were drawn, considered the theatre to be a House of Satan and in order to win respectable audiences for serious plays, companies camouflaged their productions as moral lectures and peformed them in museums and art galleries.

Thus, it is not surprising to find Mrs. Stowe rejecting the request of a prospective author to dramatize her novel. But since no copyright law then existed to protect the work, several unauthorized stage versions quickly appeared.

Changes: Trends in Drama

Adapting a novel to the requirements of a stage play is fraught with difficulty. A book that one may read leisurely over many days or weeks has to be compressed into two or three hours of performance. Characters have to function more effectively on stage and their number reduced. Place descriptions that give color and texture to the work become painted scenery. Reflective passages have to be expressed in forceful dialogue and physical action. Moreover, when a theatre begins to cater to the lower instincts of its audience, it is hard for a writer or producer to resist the temptation towards caricature, spectacle, and sensationalism. While the earliest productions of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* were not guilty of gross distortions along these lines, the seeds of later vulgarization were latent in them. Indeed, it is no disservice to Mrs. Stowe to say that the tendency for distortion was already deeply implanted in the characters she had created. For instance, at the height of acclaim for the author, a perceptive black preacher in a letter to *The Liberator* expressed the view that "resistance to tyranny was obedience to God . . . [hence] the only drawback to the matchless Uncle Tom of Mrs. Stowe was his virtue of submission to tyranny."[8] A correspondent of a black weekly paper stated his reservation more bluntly when he wrote:

> Uncle Tom must be killed, George Harris exiled! Heaven for dead Negros! Liberia for living mulattoes. Neither can live on the American continent. Death or banishment is our doom, say the Slaveocrats, the Colonizationists, and, save the mark—Mrs. Stowe![9]

The most popular and pervasive type of entertainment in the professional American theatre of the mid-nineteenth century was the minstrel show. This travesty of black life was originally supposed to represent, in humorous fashion, the ways in which southern black folk amused themselves, but the performers were all whites in blackface. Audiences too were primarily white. Most theatres either denied admission to black patrons or reserved them a section in the upper balcony among the rowdiest elements with a separate means of entrance and egress. Accordingly, few self-respecting Afro-Americans ever went to the theatre. Needless to say, no black theatre companies existed at this time, the early African Grove theatre of lower New York City in the 1820's having long since disbanded.

In a theatre that drew its entertainment from presenting caricatures of black folk while excluding blacks as performers and substantially as audience, it is easy to see how a play like *Uncle Tom's Cabin* could, in the process of time, become vulgarized. Even so, if played with honesty and seriousness, the anguished saintliness of Uncle Tom could still move the hardened playgoer to sober response. Harry Birdoff believed such was the case at the first successful New York production which took place in 1852 at the National Theatre on Chatham Square;

> At the appearance of Uncle Tom they expected to laugh once more, because a black man meant only one thing to them, an ignorant comic. Now their unaccustomed ears heard something unknown in the theatre: a good actor had the part of Uncle Tom and his very first words were delivered with the accent—broad and gutteral—but spoken so earnestly that the first laugh died away into deep silence.[10]

When the public response did come, it was observed by William Lloyd Garrison who was struck by the raucous pit audience "cheering the strongest and the sublimest anti-slavery sentiments.[11] Many people who previously shunned the theatre, including church pastors and their devout parishioners, flocked to the play in such great numbers that its phenomenal run seemed assured.

Then as now a smash hit in New York is likely to produce a flood of imitations. Four other Tom shows were quick-

ly brought out. At the Bowery Theatre, the show featured Thomas Daddy Rice, father of blackface minstrelsy, as Uncle Tom. Another was a burlesque travesty performed by the Christy Minstrels and the penetration of minstrel lampooning in the Uncle Tom story had begun in earnest. More blatant than these vulgarizations was the production by the circus showman P.T. Barnum, at his New York American Museum Theatre. Catering to the anti-slavery sentiment in the North, Barnum proclaimed that his treatment of the novel "exhibits a true picture of Negro life in the South, instead of absurdly representing the ignorant slave as possessed of all the polish of the drawingroom, and the refinement of the educated white."[11a]

Black Performers

The admission of black performers to mainstream dramatic theatre came through *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. An early New York production of the play, in a version by the white actor C.W. Taylor who played Uncle Tom, included several numbers billed as "Chorus (Nigga in de Cornfield)" and "Kentucky Breakdown Dances." These novelties, obviously imported from the ever-popular minstrel stage, were first performed by whites in blackface. By the 1870s, with Tom troupes touring the country and spread across the globe, authentic black performers were recruited as choruses to sing and dance plantation and jubilee songs and to perform so-called Negro specialties. By this time, too, the minstrel stage had been invaded by black performers who presented grotesque images of themselves for the entertainment of largely white audiences. Along with black choruses, the Tom shows introduced a variety of animals: bloodhounds to chase Eliza across the icy Ohio river, a donkey for Lawyer Marks to ride and a horse for Legree, even an elephant and several alligators were advertised as special attractions in some productions. The dramatic script was little respcted by actors who had played the show in one form or another for years. Some troupes dispensed altogether with a script and performed merely from memory.

In the circus-like atmosphere created by these extravagances, legitimate actors eschewed the Tom shows or played them only out of dire necessity. Characters, white and black alike, became stereotypes. In one of her infrequent visits to a theatrical performance, Mrs. Stowe commented on the appearance of Simon Legree, the vicious slave master: "I dressed him like a Southerner and made him blonde . . . but the actors all dress him like a Western borderman with sombrero, red shirt and high boots, and make him of dark complexion."[12] Here is an example of the stage convention of the villain as a swarthy non-Caucasoid asserting itself. When one of the touring companies went bankrupt, the manager Gustave Frohman came up with the idea of another novelty: he would get a real Afro-American to play Uncle Tom. Thus did Sam Lucas, well-known minstrel trouper, become the first black to appear in the role, a choice that was in part determined by his propensity for sporting diamonds which were used to bail out the Tom company when in debt. In another instance, the black pugilist Peter Jackson, then heavyweight champion of Australia who was seeking to establish his reputation in the United States, was cast as Uncle Tom and made to box several rounds with a contender as part of the show.

One result of this debasement of the play was to fix for decades the black performer's role on the professional stage as a song-and-dance entertainer or a comic buffoon. Many serious artists and actors resented this stereotyping and attempted to set up their own black theatre companies where they would be free to play dramatic roles. When they succeeded in doing so, the problems of securing a proper playhouse and of attracting a literate and supportive audience proved overwhelming. In their frustration, resentment against the Tom show as a cause of their troubles lingered. In 1910, students of Howard University rebelled against the singing of "plantation melodies" before white audiences which they insisted was demeaning to their race.[13]

Historic Black Experiences: Post Civil War

Another important factor in producing black disillusionment with *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, and more particularly with the character of Uncle Tom, is found in the historic experiences of Afro-Americans following the end of slavery. The success of Union forces against the rebel slave-owning states had preserved the Republic. This victory was not achieved without the direct and decisive participation of thousands of black Americans. Some 200,000 of them had enlisted in the Union Army, 30,000 in the Navy, while another quarter-million had worked as support personnel for the troops. When the war finally ended, an all-too-brief period of Reconstruction followed during which the Federal Government assumed responsibility for protecting the rights of former slaves. But this protection soon deteriorated under a reign of terror perpetrated against blacks by hardline white supremacists of the south, of which the murderous Ku Klux Klan was only the most blatant offender. By 1876 when Republican President Hayes, newly elected by means of a deal with southern democrats, declared that "absolute justice and fair play to the Negro" could best be achieved "by trusting the honorable and influential whites,"[14] blacks knew they would have to fight for their rights against the injustices of the so-called "jim crow" era. An 1880 editorial in the *Chicago Conservator*, a black newspaper, summed up the mood of Afro-Americans: "President Hayes has plainly told the colored people they must make peace at any price. We repeat it, but with a different signification—they must make peace at any price. It may cost treasure, it may cost blood, it may cost lives, but make it, be the cost what it may."[15] Even more explicit and revolutionary was the advice given in a speech by John E. Bruce, a leading black journalist, in October 1889:

> Let the Negro require at the hands of every white murderer in the south or elsewhere a life for a life. If they burn our houses, burn theirs, if they kill our wives and children, kill theirs, pursue them relentlessly, meet force with force everywhere it is offered. If they demand blood exchange it with them, until they are satisfied. By a vigorous adherence to this course the shedding of human blood by white men will soon become a thing of the past.[16]

"VERDICT" HANG THE D— YANKEE AND NIGGER"

The Case Against . . .

It was not the purpose of this article to attempt to justify or condemn these desperate counsels by black leaders of past times. They are quoted in order to emphasize and explain the militant mood of responsible black opinion in the last decades of the nineteenth century. Ironically enough, this period coincided with the ascendancy of Tom shows. Thus, while the forty-year old relic of antebellum days was roaming the nation extolling the virtues of the long-suffering, compliant, forgiving and fictional Uncle Tom, played by blacked-up white actors, blacks throughout the land were faced with the reality of Simon Legree to whom they were determined not to submit without a struggle. Obviously their former regard for the saintly Tom would sour. In a masterly essay published in 1903, W.E.B. DuBois attempted to explain the now repugnant phenomenon of the submissive black slave:

> The long system of repression and degradation of the Negro tended to emphasize the elements in his character which made him a valuable chattel: courtesy became humility, moral strength degenerated into submission, and the exquisite native appreciation of the beautiful became an infinite capacity for dumb suffering.[17]

Post World War I

It was, however, in 1919, just one year after a hundred thousand black Americans had once again risked their lives in defence of the Republic and to make the world safe for democracy, that the image of the docile Uncle Tom was publicly and passionately denounced. That year a wave of lynchings and other violent acts against Afro-Americans engulfed the nation, inspired it appears by the fear among bigoted, ignorant whites that returning black soldiers would demand the equality they had long been denied. Among the victims of rampaging white mobs were discharged black soldiers, some still in uniform. In response to these outrages, black leaders declared the advent of the New Negro whose militancy, they hoped, would finally obliterate the notion of an impotent Tom, fatalistically resigned to his inferior status. Of the many black voices raised in protest, none were more strident than those associated with the black nationalist movement of Marcus Garvey which was called the United Negro Improvement Association. At its first convention in Harlem in 1920, one of its delegates forecast the type of black leadership that the future demanded: "The Uncle Tom nigger has got to go, and his place must be taken by the new leader of the Negro race. That man will not be a white man with a black heart, or a black man with a white heart, but a black man with a black heart."[18] Garvey himself later wrote disparagingly of those leaders whom he called "our modern Uncle Toms [from whom] the slave instinct has not yet departed . . . They still believe that they can live or exist through the good graces of their masters."[19]

Even as literature, there was a reassessment of the quality and influence of Mrs. Stowe's novel. *The New Negro*, an anthology of writings by black Americans collected by Alain Locke and published in 1925, contained several re-evaluations of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. The lead-off essay by the editor, a Rhodes scholar and philosophy professor of Howard University, affirmed that "the day of 'aunties,' 'uncles,' and 'mammies' is equally gone. Uncle Tom and Sambo have passed on . . . The popular melodrama has about played itself out and it is time to scrap the fictions, garret the bogeys and settle down to a realistic facing of facts." Another contributor, the poet and journalist William Stanley Braithwaite, argued that the moral and historical effect of Uncle Tom was an artistic loss and setback since "the treatment of Negro life and character, overlaid with these forceful stereotypes, could not develop into artistically satisfying portraiture." Yet a third writer who had

been an English professor at Howard University, Montgomery Gregory, turned his attention to the character of Topsy:

> She was blissfully ignorant of any ancestors, but she has given us a fearful progeny. With her, popular dramatic interest in the Negro changed from serious moralistic drama to the comic phase . . . The earliest expression of Topsy's baneful influence is to be found in the minstrels . . . These comedians, made up into grotesque caricatures of the Negro race, fixed in the public taste a dramatic stereotype of the race that has been almost fatal to a sincere and authentic Negro drama.[20]

This outpouring of sentiment against *Uncle Tom's Cabin* came at a time when touring Tom shows were already in decline. In January, 1931, *Theatre Guild Magazine* carried an article titled "Uncle Tom is Dead." This obituary notice was in fact premature since the play was alive and well on provincial boards and the prestigious Players Club in New York mounted a handsome production of the drama in 1933. However three years later when Abbott attempted a racially integrated musical version under the title "Sweet River" this ill-conceived adaptation failed and was withdrawn after only five performances.

Post World War II

It should now be obvious why in 1945, at the end of yet another war in which black Americans fought valiantly against the Nazi menace only to return to a homeland where bigotry and injustice still prevailed, black leaders objected to the performance of a new version of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in Connecticut. Since that time, the sad figure of Uncle Tom has acquired even greater opprobrium among blacks. His name has been bracketed with "pimps, sex perverts and guilt-ridden traitors" of the race as well as with "Judases and Quislings."[22] With the noblest of intentions, Harriet Beecher Stowe created a Jekyll-and Hyde character that contained the seeds of its own destruction. Earnestly seeking to lift the burden of chattel slavery that had been imposed on the black race, she produced in Uncle Tom a character who persuaded white racists that blacks would accept slavery without a struggle. For this reason, as far as black people are concerned, Mrs. Stowe's novel, particularly in its stage adaptations, did as much harm as good. For, as the white abolitionist Thomas Wentworth Higginson wrote more than a century ago, "If it be the normal tendency of bondage to produce saints like Uncle Tom, let us all offer ourselves at auction immediately."[23]

SOME THOUGHTS ON WILLIAM WELLS BROWN'S *THE ESCAPE*

By William E. Perkins

William Wells Brown's drama, *The Escape* has been called by one critic " . . . the most authentic account in play form of the life of the slave." On the other hand Loften Mitchell has described Brown's play as follows:

> Negro author and antislavery advocate William Wells Brown is credited with *The Escape; or A Leap for Freedom.* This is reportedly the first known play by an American Negro. The work is not known to have been produced, but Mr. Brown gave readings of it in numerous places–readings that were warmly received. His comic scenes, unfortunately, are close to blackface minstrelsy, much more so than the author's slave experiences should have permitted. And his heroine is the octoroon beauty, the tragic mulatto.[1]

How are these two divergent views of the play to be reconciled? Where does the play stand in the history of Afro-American drama? The purpose of this short essay is to attempt to answer these important questions and to assess the value of the play as a portrait of the life of the slave.

Elements of Caricature

Brown had written the play in 1858 for, as he put it, his "own amusement." It is a raw and unrefined piece of drama, making no pretence to a high literary standard. It is filled with Afro-American dialect and humorous scenes of plantation mishaps and shenanigans, and though never performed in its day, must have influenced American performing arts much later in the nineteenth century. Indeed, it is one of the contentions of this essay that the play, written by an ex-slave, helped create a stage image of the Afro-American that lapsed into caricature and stereotype. One of the central characters of the play, Cato, Dr. Gaines' assistant, conforms to the standard image of nineteenth century Afro-Americans–he is childish and silly, infatuated with ornament, decoration, and titles; cunning and shiftless.

The play centers on life at the Muddy Creek Farm, owned by Dr. Gaines, a physician who treats the illnesses of the slaves in the surrounding area. Most of the slaves are mirror images of Cato and embody the same sense of caricature and stereotype. For example, two of the slave women–Tapioca and Hannah–are portrayed as weak and indecisive as they are manipulated by Mrs. Gaines to marry men they don't wish to marry. The two central slave characters–Glen and Melinda–are actual figures, who according to Brown, at the time of the writing of the play, lived in Canada. Their roles exhibit the strong abolitionist tone of the central theme–escape and freedom. Brown, like many other freedmen in ante-bellum America was active in the abolitionist movement, using the skills of the pen as a sword to cut away the image of the old South as a paternal society governed by the chivalrous code of mutual obligation and deference. This drama may be viewed as propaganda in the war against slavery making a strong case for flight as the path to freedom. Indeed, Brown's play, along with Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* must be viewed as tools designed to inflame passions and marshall support for the abolitionist cause. It is this conflict–the play as propaganda and the play as a step to blackface ministrelsy–that is at the heart of comprehending its meaning. A more detailed anatomy of the play will perhaps show us this more clearly.

The play begins with Dr. Gaines contracting with another slaveholder, Mr. Campbell, to care for his slaves. The play then introduces Cato, who from the beginning captures the caricature of the ante-bellum slave. Cato is already conspiring to pretend to be the doctor.

> Cato: I allers knowed I was a doctor, an' now de ole boss has put me at it, I muss change my coat. Ef any niggers come in, I wants to look suspectable. Dis jacket don't suit a doctor; I'll change it. Ah, now I looks like a doctor. Now I can bleed, pull teef, or cut off a leg . . .
>
> (Act I, scene ii)

Cato then proceeds to care for one of Mr. Campbell's slaves with a toothache. He pulls the wrong tooth only to incur the wrath of his master who proclaims, "I'll whip you for this conduct of yours today." (Act I, scene ii.) The character of Cato continues to act this way throughout the play. In his courtship of Tapioca, he utters, "Please squze my manners, love discomonodes me." (Act II, scene iii.) Prone to music, rhyme, and dance, Cato emerges as the comic figure in Brown's treatment of slave life.

Black Family Life Under Slavery

In Scene 3, the hero and heroine, Glen and Melinda are introduced–and so too is the romantic theme . . . Glen is in love with Melinda, but unable to "jump de broom" with her because Dr. Gaines desires her for himself. To avoid this, Glen plans to run away to Canada with Melinda. In this scene, Brown manages to catch one of the most important rationales for flight. Most slaves ran away with a single motive in mind–to preserve the family bonds they had established among themselves despite their enslavement. The bonds had grown up and over the kinds of family arrangements slave-owners had substituted for those slaves had chosen for themselves. This is most clearly revealed when Mrs. Gaines remarks on the selling of the slave, Sam:

> Mrs. Gaines: I am sure you need not feel so bad at the thought of separating Sam from Hannah. They've only been married eight months, and their attachment can't be very strong in that short time. Indeed, I shall be glad if you do sell Sam, for then I'll make Hannah jump the broomstick with Cato, and I'll have them both under my eye.
>
> (Act III, scene i)

Indeed, part of the growing antipathy to slavery during the 1850's centered on this disregard and disruption of family bonds and the abuse of the sanctity of marriage as it was understood in ante-bellum America.

The slave woman Melinda, referred to by Mrs. Gaines as a "mulatto wench," also reveals another theme prevalent in nineteenth century popular culture–the tragic existence of the mulatto woman. Often scorned by other slave women, she became the secret object of desire of many white men–slaveowners, overseers, slave traders and the like, though she could not enjoy the illusory privileges she appeared to command. This character embodied the very essence of the submerged social life under slavery–the sexual license and abuse, the confused identity, and the neurotic compulsion which drove white men to possess these women. Brown was no stranger to writing about this theme, his novel, *Clotel,* being in part a meditation upon this particular element of southern slave society. When Dr. Gaines confronts Melinda with his passion for her, the real tragedy of her life emerges:

> Sir, I am your slave; you can do as you please with the avails of my labor, but you shall never tempt me to swerve from the path of virtue.
>
> (Act III, scene iv)

PERSECUTED VIRTUE.

"She was whipped, sir, for wanting to live a decent Christian life, such as your laws give her. Love gives a right to save."—Page 98.

Overcome by jealousy, Mrs. Gaines attempts to force Melinda to drink poison which she resists with a fight.

Abolitionist Elements

As the drama draws to a close, Glen meditates upon the plight of the slaves and issues a warning:

> Oh! there is a volcano pent up in the heart of the slaves of these Southern States that will burst forth ere long. When that day comes, woe to those whom its unpitying fury may devour.
>
> (Act IV, scene i)

He recruits one of the slaves, Sampey, to show him where Dr. Gaines has hidden Melinda. With a calculating will, Glen plans the escape from his overseer, the rescue of Melinda, and the final "leap for freedom." On their path to Canada, they join Cato who has also escaped, and are led to freedom on the Underground Railroad. After a confrontation with marshalls at the Niagara River, Glen, Melinda and Cato jump safely aboard the ferry and into freedom.

The last two acts of *The Escape* are more clearly related to abolitionism than the preceding three acts. The characters representing the slaveholding element are singleminded in attempting to prevent Glen and Melinda from running away, so much so, that they ignore Cato, who takes advantage of their neglect to run away himself. But it is freedom that guides the slaves, giving them characteristics which are not present among the slaves earlier in the drama. Glen and Melinda become rational, calculating; and with a single purpose—escape—so that they may remain married and free to make choices without the sanctions of Dr. Gaines. William Wells Brown has given us a glance at this form of slave resistance through the abolitionist prism and that is where the drama stands in history. It is not "the most authentic account in play form of the life of the slave," but a worthwhile adaptation of the play form to the abolitionist mission. In that lay its importance.

In the next few pages are reprinted various selections from writers and critics commenting on the validity of Stowe's and Aiken's picture of slavery in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. The selections from early reviews give some sense of the wide range of immediate response to the novel and play. Furnas' criticism, while directed against Mrs. Stowe, should perhaps be directed at readers who take a work of fiction as if it were documentary. Stowe's comments, Kemble's journal and Weld's testimony may be instructively compared to the fictive work, as we consider, in Henson's words, "Truth Stranger than Fiction." In the comments by Fiedler, Birdoff, Wilson and Baldwin, the question of the relationship of the fictional characters to "real people" is raised again and again, leading us to consider, perhaps, whether any verbal account, no matter of what genre, can give us an accurate account of human experience. Perhaps, as Baldwin suggests, the "cage of reality bequeathed us at our birth" consists in large part of the linguistic constructs which the writers leave. Certainly, William Wells Brown's play about slavery, which utilizes outrageously stereotypical and demeaning black characters for cheap laughs, would suggest the power of the cage of language to overcome the world of unmediated experience. We obviously do not expect to resolve this issue here, but rather to use this test case to illustrate the complexity of the relationship between "fact" and "fiction," especially in a work to which destiny gave such a heavy role to play as *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.

FROM STEPHEN A HIRSCH, "UNCLE TOMITUDES: THE POPULAR REACTION TO *UNCLE TOM'S CABIN*" IN *STUDIES IN THE AMERICAN RENAISSANCE*, 1978

The bitterest negative review I have discovered in my research comes from *The Raleigh Weekly North Carolina Standard*, 2 June 1852:

"Uncle Tom's Cabin, or Life Among the Lowly" is the title of an abolitionist novel by a woman named Harriet Beecher Stowe. The book purports to be a picture of Southern slavery, but it is a lie from beginning to end. It is the most atrocious libel on the characters and institutions of the Southern people which has ever been published. This fact explains in part its extraordinary popularity at the North. A considerable share of its reputation, however, is due to the inordinate puffing of the abolition press. One cannot read the book without loathing and disgust—there is displayed in it such a vulgarity, coarseness, and profligacy of sentiment. According to this Mrs. Harriet Beecher Stowe, a Southern farm is a hell on earth presided over by a monster *Master*, who lets loose on his slaves the most savage passions of human nature, or revels with them in the lowest of animal indulgences. The "dark browed" Negro meanwhile is painted in the most attractive colours—the men are all honest, manly, and benevolent and the women are pure and bewitching. The beauties of amalgamation are fully illustrated. Yet this book is written by a *woman*, and the prurient passions of abolitionism, devour it with greedy satisfaction. If the boast of the *National Era* may be believed, no book published in this country ever had such a sale. Mrs. Harriet Beecher Stowe was once a Yankee schoolmistress in Kentucky.

SELECTIONS FROM BARNARD HEWITT, *THEATRE: U.S.A.*

(pp. 171-179)

Uncle Tom's Cabin in its various stage versions was far and away the most popular play of the decade preceding the Civil War.

Historians have counted Mrs. Stowe's novel among the immediate causes of that conflict. Her novel sold over 300,000 copies the first year. Charles A. Beard estimated that it had over a million readers. At least as many persons must have seen it on the stage during the eight years before the outbreak of hostilities. Thus the stage, as the *Herald* feared, became "an agent for the cause of abolitionism." . . .

The First Version

A version by C.W. Taylor was produced at Purdy's National Theatre in New York in August. An editorial in the New York *Herald*, September 3, 1852, concerned itself primarily with the play's political implications.

Dangerous Firebrand

> What will our Southern friends think of all our professions of respect for their delicate social institution of slavery, when they find that our amusements are overdrawn caricatures exhibiting our hatred against it and against them? Is this consistent with good faith, or honor, or the every day obligations of hospitality? No, it is not. It is a sad blunder; for when our stage shall become the deliberate agent in the cause of abolitionism, with the sanction of the public, and their approbation, the peace and harmony of the Union will soon be ended.
>
> We would . . . advise all concerned to drop the play of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* at once and forever. The thing is in bad taste—not according to good faith to the constitution, or consistent with either of the two Baltimore platforms; and is calculated, if persisted in, to become a firebrand of the most dangerous character to the peace of the whole country.

The public apparently accepted the *Herald's* advice. The first *Uncle Tom* was withdrawn after eleven performances.

However the fires smoldered elsewhere. George C. Howard . . . comissioned Charles L. Aiken, who was a member of the company, to prepare a dramatization. Under the inadequate copyright law, the stage rights were not secured to Mrs. Stowe. This version, in which Cordelia played Eva, her mother Topsy, her father St. Clair, and Aiken doubled as George Harris and Shelby, opened in September 1852, and ran for 100 performances. The population of Troy was about 9,000. This run was followed by a successful engagement in Albany.

Then George L. Fox, Howard's brother-in-law, with some difficulty persuaded Purdy, who remembered the failure of Taylor's version, to bring it to the National. It opened there without fanfare on July 18, 1853, and immediately caught on. Its popularity grew, and so great was the demand for seats as the engagement continued, that two afternoon performances were added to the six evening ones, then four more afternoon performances, and finally six morning performances, so that it was presented three times a day. This in spite of the fact that competing versions were rushed onto the stages of two rival theatres. . . .

A Review of Aiken's Version:

A New York correspondent wrote enthusiastically to William Lloyd Garrison's *The Liberator*, September 9, 1853:

> I went on Saturday evening to see the play of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, at the National Theatre, invited thereto by the description of the *Times*, which appeared in a late *Standard*. That description does no more than justice to the play. It is better by one hundred per cent, than the version of the Boston Museum. If the shrewdest abolitionist amongst us had prepared the drama with a view to make the strongest anti-slavery impression, he could scarcely have done the work better. O, it was a sight worth seeing, those ragged, coatless men and boys in the pit (the very material of which mobs are made) cheering the strongest and the sublimist anti-slavery sentiments! The whole audience was at times melted to tears, and I own that I was no exception. It was noticeable that the people, after witnessing the death of Uncle Tom, went out of the house as gravely and seriously as people retire from a religious meeting! I wish every abolitionist in the land could see this play as I saw it, and exult as I did that, when haughty pharisees will not testify against slavery, the very stones are crying out!

Another Review of Aiken's Version:

The editor of the New York *Atlas*, devoted nearly two columns of editorial space to the phenomenon on October 16, 1853:

> Last Saturday evening . . . we made a visit to the National Threatre. . . .
>
> Among the audience, we recognized many people who have been taught to look on the stage and all that belongs to it with horror and contempt; and, not the least conspicuous among the rare faces, was that of a Quaker gentleman whose drab, shad-belly coat and remarkably broaded brimmed beaver, gave him a commanding aspect. . . .
>
> There was also recognized among the mass who occupied and crowded the theatre, Methodists, Baptists, Presbyterians, and Congregationalists of the straight-laced school, beside a variety of other religionists whose creeds are not accounted absolutely orthodox.
>
> The gallery was filled with a heroic class of people many of them in red woolen shirts, with countenances as hardy and rugged as the implements of industry employed by them in the pursuit of their vocation. There was also a very considerable array of beauty and fashion sprinkled among the parquette and boxes. . . .
>
> We happened to get rather late to the theatre, and found the piece well under way. The scene then being delineated was that of the escape of Eliza Harris across the Ohio River with her infant in her arms. It appeared to be rather coldly received by the audience; who, when the dauntless mother reached the Indiana shore and offered her thanks to Almighty God for His interposition and preservation—at which point, what is theatrically called " a decided hit," is supposed to be made by the actress—there was not a hand of applause beyond what we gave. We were astonished that a part so cleverly conceived and executed should not obtain some testimonial of appro-

bation, when, on looking around, we discovered that the whole audience was in tears! It was composed of those, who if they

"Came to laugh, remained to pray."

The object of all was to witness a delineation on the stage of the scenes embraced in Mrs. Beecher Stowe's book—neither a novel or romance can it be called—by the players. It was evident that all sympathised with the sentiments embodied in the play; for, if such had not been the fact, how could it happen that a theatre which the aristocracy of the profession, as well as the aristocracy of the city has denominated "plebian" and "minor," should be actually stuffed with the aristocracy of morality, religion, patriotism, intelligence and virtue? . . .

The succeeding scene, "The Freeman's Defence," passed off without producing any apparent emotion. . . . [We] made up our minds to give George Harris, (Mr. Prior) a round of applause.

Old Uncle Tom, who is the hero of the piece, was enacted by Mr. J. Lingard, . . .

The character of the meek, pious and subdued old negro. . . . was ably delineated. . . . In almost every instance he was as pathetic as the author had made the African he represented.

Precious Gem of Precocity

Eva was enacted by "little Miss Cordelia Howard," and, . . . we avow that Little Cordelia executed the part assigned her in accordance with the dictates of Jehovah and all his ministering angels . . .

. . . . . .

We manifest neither hostility to, or love for the South. We would not interfere with any one of its rights—we would shoulder our muskets to fight its battles, if it were subjected either to invasion or insurrection. Her local and municipal regulations we do not wish to interfere with—we of the North, have no right to interfere with them. If the South is attached to the institution of slavery, and adheres to it, she is right; and, it ill becomes the North to attempt to interfere with her local affairs. Such are the opinions that we have always expressed, and probably shall express, as long as we live. But, when the South, through her demagogues, and political vagabond allies in the North, demands that the North shall not discuss at home and within the sacred precincts of her altars and her firesides, any question, and every question, that may be presented to her, then we, as Northmen and freemen, who cannot be made to employ the degraded language of the bondsman and villain, must object, and demand for the North the rights secured to the whole American Republic. This is our platform.

The drama of Uncle Tom's Cabin, is now enacting in New York, Philadelphia, Boston—in all the principal towns and cities of the free states; and, for good or for evil, is producing effects on the democratic masses, which few anticipated.

SELECTION FROM *GOODBYE TO UNCLE TOM*

by J.C. Furnas

p. 37-38

A Journal of a Residence on a Georgian Plantation fostered few of the misconceptions that helped to make a tragic failure of Reconstruction; whereas a great modern historian concludes: "No small part of the incredible optimism with which the North later approached the task of converting slaves into voters, self-dependent citizens, and legislators, thinking it could be done overnight, is chargeable to the impression diffused by Mrs. Stowe." Fanny Kemble could never have written to the Duchess of Argyle or anybody else as Mrs. Stowe did in 1862:

> . . . whether God be with us or not, I know He is with the slave, and with his redemption will come the solution of our question . . . I wish [Southerners] no ill, feel no bitterness. . . . we don't expect any more of *them*, but if slavery is destroyed, one generation of education and liberty will efface these stains.

That Sunday-school superficiality was what ailed much of Mrs. Stowe's message. It is notable further that Fanny Kemble encouraged none of the other tendentious errors that *Uncle Tom* saddled on the nation. Her book has no condescending profundities about "the African race"; no tunnel-vision concentration on the difficult but minor problem of "white as you are"; no wistful dwelling on the possibility of removing the Negro problem by removing the Negroes; no misleading emphasis on the slave as a freedom-craving Spartacus or a desponding potential suicide; no temptation to the stage to cheapen the Negro by tawdry hippodroming of the superficialities of a third-rate novel. And on the positive side Fanny told much that her readers could not otherwise learn (certainly not from Mrs. Stowe) about the severe cultural handicaps of slaves that probably would require generations to eradicate.

Thus, if the nation had had the opportunity to focus on her book instead of on *Uncle Tom*, it might have floundered into the Civil War with a better chance of doing clearer thinking now and again about the South and slavery. . . . This consideration leads to bitter thoughts about Mrs. Stowe's well-meant irresponsibilities. To our great emotional and economic cost, we have had to live with the consequences of them for over a century now, and the end is not yet.

SELECTIONS FROM FRANCES ANN KEMBLE, *JOURNAL OF A RESIDENCE ON A GEORGIAN PLANTATION IN 1838-1839*

"Conversations With a Slave About Freedom" (pp. 84-85)

I had a conversation that interested me a good deal, during my walk today, with my peculiar slave, Jack . . . Today, in the midst of his torrent of inquiries about places and things, I suddenly asked him if he would like to be free. A gleam of light absolutely shot over his whole countenance, like the vivid and instantaneous lightning; he stammered, hesitated, became excessively confused, and at length replied: "Free, missis! what for me wish to be free? Oh no, missis, me no wish to be free, if massa only let me keep pig!" The fear of offending by uttering that forbidden wish—the dread of admitting, by its expression, the slightest discontent with his present situation—the desire to conciliate my favor, even at the expense of strangling the intense natural longing that absolutely glowed in his every feature—it was a sad spectacle, and I repented my

question. As for the pitful request, which he reiterated several times, adding: "No, missis, me no want to be free; me work till me die for missis and massa," with the increased emphasis; it amounted only to this, that Negroes once were, but no longer are, permitted to keep pigs . . . You perceive at once (or, if you could have seen the boy's face you would have perceived at once) that his situation was no mystery to him; that his value to Mr. [Butler],* and, as he supposed, to me, was perfectly well known to him, and that he comprehended immediately that his expressing even the desire to be free might be construed by me into an offense, and sought, by eager protestations, of his delighted acquiescence in slavery, to conceal his soul's natural yearning, lest I should resent it. It was a sad passage between us and sent me home full of the most painful thoughts. [*Mr. Butler is the author's husband.]

"The Infirmary" (p. 70)

[H]ow shall I describe to you the spectacle which was presented to me on entering the [infirmary]? But half the casements, of which there were six, were glazed, and these were obscured with dirt, almost as much as the other windowless ones were darkened by the dingy shutters, which the shivering inmates had fastened to in order to protect themselves from the cold. In the enormous chimney glimmered the powerless embers of a few stock of wood, round which, however, as many of the sick women as could approach were cowering, some on wooden settles, most of them on the ground, excluding those who were too ill to rise; and these last poor wretches lay prostrate on the floor, without bed, mattres, or pillow, buried in tattered and filthy blankets which, huddled round them as they lay strewed about, left hardly space to move upon the floor. And here, in their hour of sickness and suffering, lay those whose health and strength are spent in unrequited labor for us–those who, perhaps even yesterday, were being urged on their unpaid task–those whose husbands, fathers, brothers and sons were even at that hour sweating over the earth, whose produce was to buy for us all the luxuries which can alleviate sickness. I stood in the midst of them, perfectly unable to speak, the tears pouring from my eyes at this sad spectacle of their misery, myself and my emotion alike strange and incomprehensible to them. Here lay women expecting every hour the terrors and agonies of childbirth, others who had just brought their doomed offspring into the world, others who were groaning over the anguish and bitter disappointment of miscarriages–here lay some burning with fever, others chilled with cold and aching with rheumatism, upon the hard cold, ground, the draughts and dampness of the atmosphere increasing their sufferings, and dirt, noise, and stench, and every aggravation of which sickness is capable, combined in their condition–here they lay like brute beasts, absorbed in physical suffering; unvisited by any of those divine influences which may ennoble the dispensations of pain and illness, forsaken, as it seemed to me, of all good; and yet, O God, Thou surely hadst not forsaken them! Now pray take notice that this is the hospital of an estate where the owners are supposed to be humane, the overseer efficient and kind, and the Negroes remarkably well cared for and comfortable.

"Description of a Slave Preacher, London" (pp. 149-150)

Think, Elizabeth, of that man London, who, in spite of all the bitter barriers in his way, has learned to read, has read his Bible, teaches it to his unfortunate fellows, and is used by his owner and his owner's agents, for all these causes, as an effectual influence for good over the slaves of whom he is himself the despised and injured companion. Like them subject to the driver's lash; like them, the helpless creature of his master's despotic will, without a right or a hope in this dreary world. But though the light he has attained must show him the terrible aspects of his fate hidden by blessed ignorance from his companions, it reveals to him also other rights and other hopes–another world, another life–toward which he leads, according to the grace vouchsafed to him, his poor fellow slaves. How can we keep this man in such a condition? How is such a cruel sin of injustice to be answered?

Mothers with young Children at work in the field.

"Slave Motherhood" (pp. 156-157)

The condition of these places and of their inhabitants is, of course, the same all over the plantation, and if I were to describe them I should but weary you with a repetition of identical phenomena; filthy, wretched, almost naked, always barelegged and barefooted children; negligent, ignorant, wretched mothers, whose apparent indifference to the plight of their offspring, and utter incapacity to alter it, are the inevitable result of their slavery. It is hopeless to attempt to reform their habits or improve their condition while the women are condemned to field labor; nor is it possible to overestimate the bad moral effect of the system as regards the women, entailing this enforced separation from their children, and neglect of all the cares and duties of mother, nurse, and even housewife, which are all merged in the mere physical toil of a human hoeing machine. . . . To be sure, while the women are pregnant their task is diminished, and this is one of the many indirect inducements held out to reckless propagation, which has a sort of premium offered to it in the consideration of less work and more food, counterbalanced by none of the sacred responsibilities which hallow and ennoble the relation of parent and child; in short, as their lives are for the most part those of mere animals, their increase is literally mere animal breeding, to which every encouragement is given, for it adds to the master's livestock and the value of his estate.

Showing how slavery improves the condition of the female sex.

"Flogging" (p. 215)

[Louisa] had not finished her task one day, when she said she felt ill, and unable to do so, and had been severely flogged by driver Bran, in whose "gang" she then was. The next day, in spite of this encouragement to labor, she had again been unable to complete her appointed work; and Bran having told her that he'd tie her up and flog her if she did not get it done, she had left the field and run into the swamp.

"Tie you up, Louisa!" said I; "what is that?" She then described to me that they were fastened up by their wrists to a beam or a branch of a tree, their feet barely touching the ground, so as to allow them no purchase for resistance or evasion of the lash, their clothes turned over their heads,

and their backs scored with a leather thong, either by the driver himself, or, if he pleases to inflict their punishment by deputy, any of the men he may choose to summon to the office; it might be father, brother, husband, or lover, if the overseer so ordered it. I turned sick, and my blood curdled listening to these details from the slender young slip of a lassie, with her poor piteous face and murmuring, pleading voice.

"Mr. Butler's Views on Flogging Slaves"
(pp. 159-161)

I had a long and painful conversation with Mr. [Butler] upon the subject of the flogging which had been inflicted on the wretched Teresa. These discussions are terrible: they throw me into perfect agonies of distress for the slaves, whose position is utterly hopeless; for myself, whose intervention in their behalf sometimes seems to me worse than useless; for Mr. [Butler], whose share in this horrible system fills me by turns with indignation and pity. But, after all, what can he do? how can he help it all? Moreover, born and bred in America, how should he care or wish to help it? and, of course, he does not; and I am in despair that he does not; et voilà, it is a happy and hopeful plight for us both. He maintained that there had been neither hardship nor injustice in the case of Teresa's flogging; and that, moreover, she had not been flogged at all for complaining to me, but simply because her allotted task was not done at the appointed time. Of course this was the result of her having come to appeal to me instead of going to her labor; and as she knew perfectly well the penalty she was incurring, he maintained that there was neither hardship nor injustice in the case; the whole thing was a regularly established law, with which all the slaves were perfectly well acquainted; and this case was no exception whatever. The circumstance of my being on the island could not, of course, be allowed to overthrow the whole system of discipline established to secure the labor and obedience of the slaves; and if they chose to try experiments as to that fact, they and I must take the consequences. At the end of the day, the driver of the gang to which Teresa belongs reported her work not done, and Mr. O—— ordered him to give her the usual number of stripes, which order the driver of course obeyed, without knowing how Teresa had employed her time instead of hoeing. But Mr. O—— knew well enough, for the wretched woman told me that she had herself told him she should appeal to me about her weakness, and suffering, and inability to do the work exacted from her.

He did not, however, think proper to exceed in her punishment the usual number of stripes allotted to the non-performance of the appointed daily task, and Mr. [Butler] pronounced the whole transaction perfectly satisfactory and en regle. The common drivers are limited in their powers of chastisement, not being allowed to administer more than a certain number of lashes to their fellow slaves. Headman Frank, as he is called, has alone the privilege of exceeding this limit; and the overseer's latitude of infliction is only curtailed by the necessity of avoiding injury to life or limb. The master's irresponsible power has no such bound. When I was thus silenced on the particular case under discussion, I resorted, in my distress and indignation, to the abstract question, as I never can refrain from doing; and to Mr. [Butler]'s assertion of the justice of poor Teresa's punishment, I retorted the manifest injustice of unpaid and enforced labor; the brutal inhumanity of allowing a man to strip and lash a woman, the mother of ten children; to exact from her, toil, which was to maintain in luxury two idle young men, the owners of the plantation. I said I thought female labor of the sort exacted from these slaves, and corporal chastisement such as they endure, must be abhorrent to any manly or humane man. Mr. [Butler] said he thought it was disagreeable, and left me to my reflections with that concession.

SELECTION FROM THEODORE WELD, *AMERICAN SLAVERY AS IT IS, TESTIMONY OF A THOUSAND WITNESSES*

p. 39

Dr. Demming a gentleman of high respectability, residing in Ashland, Richland county, Ohio, stated . . .

"That during a recent tour at the south, . . . he had an opportunity of conversing with a Mr. Dickinson, a resident of Pittsburg, in company with a number of cotton-planters and slave-dealers, from Louisiana, Alabama, and Mississippi. Mr. Dickinson stated as a fact, that the sugar planters upon the sugar coast in Louisiana had ascertained, that, as it was usually necessary to employ about *twice* the amount of labor during the boiling season, that was required during the season of raising, they could, by excessive driving, day and night, during the boiling season, accomplish the whole labor *with one set of hands*. By pursuing this plan, they could afford *to sacrifice a set of hands once in seven years!* He further stated that this horrible system was now practised to a considerable extent! The correctness of this statement was substantially admitted by the slaveholders then on board."

The late Mr. Samuel Blackwell, a highly respected citizen of Jersey city, . . . had not only every facility afforded him by the planters, for personal inspection of all parts of the process of sugar-making, but received from them the most unreserved communications, as to their management of their slaves. . . . Mr. B., after his return, made the following statement: . . . "That the planters generally declared to him, that they were *obliged* so to over-work their slaves during the sugar-making season, (from eight to ten weeks,) as to *use them up* in seven or eight years. For, said they, after the process is commenced, it must be pushed without cessation night and day; and we cannot afford to keep a sufficient number of slaves to do the *extra* work at the time of sugar-making, as we could not profitably employ them the rest of the year."

It is not only true for the sugar planters, but of the slaveholders generally throughout the far south and south west, that they believe it for their interest to wear out the slaves by excessive toil in eight or ten years after they put them into the field.

A Woman chained to a Girl, and a Man in irons at work in the field.

Rev. Doctor Reed, of London, who went through Kentucky, Virginia and Maryland in the summer of 1834, gives the following testimony:

"I was told confidently and from *excellent authority*, that recently at a meeting of planters in South Carolina, the question was seriously discussed whether the slave is more profitable to the owner, if well fed, well clothed, and worked lightly, or if made the most of *at once*, and exhausted in some eight years. The decision was in favor of the last alternative. That decision will perhaps make many shudder. But to my mind this is not the chief evil. The greater and original evil is considering the *slave as property*. If he is only property and my property, then I have some right to ask how I may make that property *most available*."

"Visit to the American Churches," by Rev. Drs. Reed and Mattheson, Vol. 2. p. 173.

SELECTION FROM *THE KEY TO UNCLE TOM'S CABIN,* HARRIET BEECHER STOWE,

pp. 91-92.

Topsy stands as the representative of a large class of the children who are growing up under the institution of slavery–quick, active, subtle and ingenious, apparently utterly devoid of principle and conscience, keenly penetrating, by an instinct which exists in the childish mind, the degradation of their condition, and the utter hopelessness of rising above it; feeling the black skin on them, like the mark of Cain, to be a sign of reprobation and infamy, and urged on by a kind of secret desperation to make their "calling and election" in sin "sure."

We are not now speaking of the Southern States merely, but of the New England States; for, startling as it may appear, *slavery is not yet wholly abolished in the free States of the North.* The most unchristian part of it, that which gives to it all the bitterness and all the sting, is yet, in a great measure, unrepealed; it is the practical denial to the negro of the rights of human brotherhood. In consequence of this, Topsy is a character which may be found at the North as well as at the South.

In conducting the education of the negro, mulatto, and quadroon children, the writer has often observed this fact–that, for a certain time, and up to a certain age, they kept equal pace with, and were often superior to, the white children with whom they were associated; but that there came a time when they became indifferent to learning, and made no further progress. This was invariably at the age when they were old enough to reflect upon life, and to perceive that society had no place to offer them for which anything more would be requisite than the rudest and most elementary knowledge. . . . Who does not see the answer? It is this–which was so truly said by poor Topsy–"NOTHING BUT A NIGGER!"

It is this, burnt into the soul by the branding-iron of cruel and unchristian scorn, that is a sorer and deeper wound than all the physical evils of slavery together.

The Original English Conception of Topsy, Adelphi Theatre, London, 1853

SELECTION FROM HARRY BIRDOFF, *THE WORLD'S GREATEST HIT*

(pp. 162-163)

London was naturally curious to see the American interpretation . . . [of *Uncle Tom's Cabin,*]

. . . Topsy amazed everyone. The critic of *Era* described her: "Mrs. Howard's Topsy strikes us as an admirable performance–indeed, as such a perfect emobidment of Mrs. Beecher Stowe's Topsy that one would imagine both ladies had studied from one model. Yet it is not the Topsy we have been familiar with on the stage–it is not merely the droll, half idiot, wholly ignorant Topsy of the English stage, but the shrewd, cunning, naturally wicked, almost impish Topsy of reality–the child for whom nobody cared, that in a figurative sense may be said with perfect truth 'never to have been born,' that 'never had no fader, nor moder, nor broder, nor sister, nor aunt–no, none on em–that never had nothin' nor nobody.' At one moment she is stubborn, insensate, and unimpressionable–anon, she flies into an ungovernable, almost demoniac rage, and her cunning and revenge exhibit in a wonderful degree the effects of bad passions, allowed to grow up unchecked, like weeds in a fair garden of the breast. Her elf-like figure, and the strange, wild, screaming chant in which she sang the song, 'I'se So Wicked,' was something quite *sui generis* unlike anything we have before seen; but it seemed to us to realize the picture of the authoress, and we believe that it is a truthful representation of the original."

SELECTIONS FROM *THE NARRATIVE OF WILLIAM WELLS BROWN*

A woman was also kept at the quarters to do the cooking for the field hands, who were summoned to their unrequited toil every morning at four o'clock by the ringing of a bell hung on a post near the house of the overseer. They were allowed half an hour to eat their breakfast and get to the field. At half past four a horn was blown by the overseer, which was the signal to commence work; and everyone that was not on the spot at the time had to receive ten lashes from the Negro-whip, with which the overseer always went armed. The handle was about three feet long, with the butt-end filled with lead, and the lash, six or seven feet in length, made of cowhide, with platted wire on the end of it. This whip was put in requisition very frequently and freely, and a small offense on the part of a

slave furnished an occasion for its use. During the time that Mr. Cook was overseer, I was a house servant–a situation preferable to that of a field hand, as I was better fed, better clothed, and not obliged to rise at the ringing of the bell, but about half an hour after. I have often laid and heard the crack of the whip and the screams of the slave. My mother was a field hand, and one morning was ten or fifteen minutes behind the others in getting into the field. As soon as she reached the spot where they were at work, the overseer commenced whipping her. She cried, "Oh pray!–Oh pray!Oh pray!"–these are generally the words of slaves when imploring mercy at the hands of the oppressors. I heard her voice and knew it, and jumped out of my bunk and went to the door. Though the field was some distance from the house, I could hear every crack of the whip, and every groan and cry of my poor mother. I remained at the door, not daring to venture any further. The cold chills ran over me and I wept aloud. After giving her ten lashes, the sound of the whip ceased, and I returned to my bed and found no consolation but in my tears. Experience has taught me that nothing can be more heart-rending than for one to see a dear and beloved mother or sister tortured, and to hear their cries and not be able to render them assistance. But such is the position which an American slave occupies.

. . . . . .

There was also, among the servants, a girl whose master resided in the country. Her name was Patsey. Mr. Colburn tied her up one evening and whipped her until several of the boarders came out and begged him to desist. The reason for whipping her was this. She was engaged to be married to a man belonging to Major William Christy, who resided four or five miles north of the city. Mr. Colburn had forbid her to see John Christy. The reason of this was said to be the regard which he himself had for Patsey. She went to meeting that evening, and John returned home with her. Mr. Colburn had intended to flog John, if he came within the inclosure; but John knew too well the temper of his rival and kept at a safe distance. So he took vengeance on the poor girl. If all the slave drivers had been called together, I do not think a more cruel man than John Colburn–and he too a northern man–could have been found among them.

While living at the Missouri Hotel, a circumstance occurred which caused me great unhappiness. My master sold my mother and all her children, except myself. They were sold to different persons in the city of St. Louis.

SELECTION FROM *TRUTH STRANGER THAN FICTION: FATHER HENSON'S STORY OF HIS OWN LIFE*

John McKenny . . . occasionally served as a minister of the Gospel . . . One Sunday . . . my mother urged me to ask master's permission to go and hear him. I had so often been beaten for making such a request that I refused to make it. She still persisted, telling me that I could never become a Christian if I minded beatings–that I must take up my cross and bear it . . . To gratify her I went to my master and asked permission to attend the meeting. His favor to me was shown for this once by allowing me to go . . . I hurried off, without any definite expectations of benefit or amusement; for . . . and I was then eighteen years old, I had never heard a sermon . . . except . . . from my mother, on the responsibility of all to a Supreme Being. When I arrived . . . the speaker was just beginning . . . "That he, by the Grace of God, should taste of death for every man." This was the first text of the Bible to which I had ever listened, knowing it to be such. I have never forgotten it . . .

The divine character of Jesus Christ, his tender love for mankind, his forgiving spirit, his compassion for the outcast and despised, his cruel crucifixion and glorious ascension were all depicted . . . Again and again did the preacher reiterate the words "for every man." These glad tidings . . . were for the slave as well as the master, the poor as well as the rich, for the persecuted, the distressed, the heavy-laden, the captive; for me among the rest, a poor, despised, abused creature, deemed of others fit for nothing but unrequited toil–but mental and bodily degradation. O, the blessedness and sweetness of feeling that I was loved! I would have died that moment, with joy, for the compassionate Saviour about whom I was hearing . . . I felt sorry that "Massa Riley" didn't know him, sorry he should live such a coarse, wicked, cruel life. Swallowed up in the beauty of the divine love, I loved my enemies, and prayed for them that did despitefully use and entreat me.

As I went home, I became so excited that I turned aside from the road into the woods, and prayed to God for light and for aid . . . I could not help talking much on these subjects with those about me; and it was not long before I began to pray with them, and exhort them, and to impart to the poor slaves those little glimmerings of light from another world, which had reached my own eye. In a few years I became quite an esteemed preacher among them, and I will not believe it is vanity which leads me to think I was useful to some.

EVERYBODY'S PROTEST NOVEL, JAMES BALDWIN

In *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, that cornerstone of American social protest fiction, St. Clare, the kindly master, remarks to his coldly disapproving Yankee cousin, Miss Ophelia, that, so far as he is able to tell, the blacks have been turned over to the devil for the benefit of the whites in this world—however, he adds thoughtfully, it may turn out in the next. Miss Ophelia's reaction is, at least, vehemently right-minded: "This is perfectly horrible!" she exclaims. "You ought to be ashamed of yourselves!"

Miss Ophelia, as we may suppose, was speaking for the author; her exclamation is the moral, neatly framed, and incontestable like those improving mottoes sometimes found hanging on the walls of furnished rooms. And, like these mottoes, before which one invariably flinches, recognizing an insupportable, almost an indecent glibness, she and St. Clare are terribly in earnest. Neither of them questions the medieval morality from which their dialogue springs: black, white, the devil, the next world—posing its alternatives between heaven and the flames—were realities for them as, of course, they were for their creator. They spurned and were terrified of the darkness, striving mightily for the light; and considered from this aspect, Miss Ophelia's exclamation, like Mrs. Stowe's novel, achieves a bright, almost a lurid significance, like the light from a fire which consumes a witch. This is the more striking as one considers the novels of Negro oppression written in our own, more enlightened day, all of which say only: "This is perfectly horrible! You ought to be ashamed of yourselves!" (Let us ignore, for the moment, those novels of oppression written by Negroes, which add only a raging, near-paranoiac postscript to this statement and actually reinforce, as I hope to make clear later, the principles which activate the oppression they decry.)

Uncle Tom's Cabin is a very bad novel, having, in its self-righteous, virtuous sentimentality, much in common with *Little Women*. Sentimentality, the ostentatious parading of excessive and spurious emotion, is the mark of dishonesty, the inability to feel; the wet eyes of the sentimentalist betray his aversion to experience, his fear of life, his arid heart; and it is always, therefore, the signal of secret and violent inhumanity, the mask of cruelty. *Uncle Tom's Cabin*—like its multitudinous, hard-boiled descendants—is a catalogue of violence. This is explained

by the nature of Mrs. Stowe's subject matter, her laudable determination to flinch from nothing in presenting the complete picture; an explanation which falters only if we pause to ask whether or not her picture is indeed complete; and what constriction or failure of perception forced her to so depend on the description of brutality—unmotivated, senseless—and to leave unanswered and unnoticed the only important question: what it was, after all, that moved her people to such deeds.

But this, let us say, was beyond Mrs. Stowe's powers; she was not so much a novelist as an impassioned pamphleteer; her book was not intended to do anything more than prove that slavery was wrong; was, in fact, perfectly horrible. This makes material for a pamphlet but it is hardly enough for a novel; and the only question left to ask is why we are bound still within the same constriction. How is it that we are so loath to make a further journey than that made by Mrs. Stowe, to discover and reveal something a little closer to the truth?

But that battered word, truth, having made its appearance here, confronts one immediately with a series of riddles and has, moreover, since so many gospels are preached, the unfortunate tendency to make one belligerent. Let us say, then, that truth, as used here, is meant to imply a devotion to the human being, his freedom and fulfillment; freedom which cannot be legislated, fulfillment which cannot be charted. This is the prime concern, the frame of reference; it is not to be confused with a devotion to Humanity which is too easily equated with a devotion to a Cause; and Causes, as we know, are notoriously bloodthirsty. We have, as it seems to me, in this most mechanical and interlocking of civilizations, attempted to lop this creature down to the status of a time-saving invention. He is not, after all, merely a member of a Society or a Group or a deplorable conundrum to be explained by Science. He is—and how old-fashioned the words sound! —something more than that, something resolutely indefinable, unpredictable. In overlooking, denying, evading his complexity—which is nothing more than the disquieting complexity of ourselves—we are diminished and we perish; only within this web of ambiguity, paradox, this hunger, danger, darkness, can we find at once ourselves and the power that will free us from ourselves. It is this power of revelation which is the business of the novelist, this journey toward a more vast reality which must take precedence over all other claims. What is today parroted as his Responsibility—which seems to mean that he must make formal declaration that he is involved in, and affected by, the lives of other people and to say something improving about this somewhat self-evident fact—is, when he believes it, his corruption and our loss; moreover, it is rooted in, interlocked with and intensifies this same mechanization. Both *Gentleman's Agreement* and *The Postman Always Rings Twice* exemplify this terror of the human being, the determination to cut him down to size. And in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* we may find foreshadowing of both: the formula created by the necessity to find a lie more palatable than the truth has been handed down and memorized and persists yet with a terrible power.

It is interesting to consider one more aspect of Mrs. Stowe's novel, the method she used to solve the problem of writing about a black man at all. Apart from her lively procession of field hands, house niggers, Chloe, Topsy, etc.—who are the stock, lovable figures presenting no problem—she has only three other Negroes in the book. These are the important ones and two of them may be dismissed immediately, since we have only the author's word that they are Negro and they are, in all other respects, as white as she can make them. The two are George and Eliza, a married couple with a wholly adorable child—whose quaintness, incidentally, and whose charm, rather put one in mind of a darky bootblack doing a buck and wing to the clatter of condescending coins. Eliza is a beautiful, pious hybrid, light enough to pass—the heroine of *Quality* might, indeed, be her reincarnation—differing from the genteel mistress who has overseered her education only in the respect that she is a servant. George is darker, but makes up for it by being a mechanical genius, and is, moreover, sufficiently un-Negroid to pass through town, a fugitive from his master, disguised as a Spanish gentleman, attracting no attention whatever beyond admiration. They are a race apart from Topsy. It transpires by the end of the novel, through one of those energetic, last-minute convolutions of the plot, that Eliza has some connection with French gentility. The figure from whom the novel takes its name, Uncle Tom, who is a figure of controversy yet, is jet-black, wooly-haired, illiterate; and he is phenomenally forbearing. He has to be; he is black; only through this forbearance can he survive or triumph. (*Cf.* Faulkner's preface to *The Sound and the Fury*: These others were not Compsons. They were black:—They endured.) His triumph is metaphysical, unearthly; since he is black, born without the light, it is only through humility, the incessant mortification of the flesh, that he can enter into communion with God or man. The virtuous rage of Mrs. Stowe is motivated by nothing so temporal as a concern for the relationship of men to one another—or, even, as she would have claimed, by a concern for their relationship to God—but merely by a panic of being hurled into the flames, of being caught in traffic with the devil. She embraced this merciless doctrine with all her heart, bargaining shamelessly before the throne of grace: God and salvation becoming her personal property, purchased with the coin of her virtue. Here, black equates with evil and white with grace; if, being mindful of the necessity of good works, she could not cast out the blacks —a wretched, huddled mass, apparently, claiming, like an obsession, her inner eye—she could not embrace them either without purifying them of sin. She must cover their intimidating nakedness, robe them in white, the garments of salvation; only thus could she herself be delivered from ever-present sin, only thus could she bury, as St. Paul demanded, "the carnal man, the man of the flesh." Tom, therefore, her only black man, has been robbed of his humanity and divested of his sex. It is the price for that darkness with which he has been branded.

Uncle Tom's Cabin, then, is activated by what might be called a theological terror, the terror of damnation; and the spirit that breathes in this book, hot, self-righteous, fearful, is not different from that spirit of medieval times which sought to exorcize evil by burning witches; and is not different from that terror which activates a lynch mob. One need not, indeed, search for examples so historic or so gaudy; this is a warfare waged daily in the heart, a warfare so vast, so relentless and so powerful that the interracial handshake or the interracial marriage can be as crucifying as the public hanging or the secret rape. This panic motivates our cruelty, this fear of the dark makes it impossible that our lives shall be other than superficial; this, interlocked with and feeding our glittering, mechanical, inescapable civilization which has put to death our freedom.

This, notwithstanding that the avowed aim of the American protest novel is to bring greater freedom to the oppressed. They are forgiven, on the strength of these good intentions, whatever violence they do to language, whatever excessive demands they make of credibility. It is, indeed, considered the sign of a frivolity so intense as to approach decadence to suggest that these books are both badly written and wildly improbable. One is told to put first things first, the good of society coming before niceties of style or characterization. Even if this were incontestable—for what exactly is the "good" of society?

—it argues an insuperable confusion, since literature and sociology are not one and the same; it is impossible to discuss them as if they were. Our passion for categorization, life neatly fitted into pegs, has led to an unforeseen, paradoxical distress; confusion, a breakdown of meaning. Those categories which were meant to define and control the world for us have boomeranged us into chaos; in which limbo we whirl, clutching the straws of our definitions. The "protest" novel, so far from being disturbing, is an accepted and comforting aspect of the American scene, ramifying that framework we believe to be so necessary. Whatever unsettling questions are raised are evanescent, titillating; remote, for this has nothing to do with us, it is safely ensconced in the social arena, where, indeed, it has nothing to do with anyone, so that finally we receive a very definite thrill of virtue from the fact that we are reading such a book at all. This report from the pit reassures us of its reality and its darkness and of our own salvation; and "As long as such books are being published," an American liberal once said to me, "everything will be all right."

But unless one's ideal of society is a race of neatly analyzed, hard-working ciphers, one can hardly claim for the protest novels the lofty purpose they claim for themselves or share the present optimism concerning them. They emerge for what they are: a mirror of our confusion, dishonesty, panic, trapped and immobilized in the sunlit prison of the American dream. They are fantasies, connecting nowhere with reality, sentimental; in exactly the same sense that such movies as *The Best Years of Our Lives* or the works of Mr. James M. Cain are fantasies. Beneath the dazzling pyrotechnics of these current operas one may still discern, as the controlling force, the intense theological preoccupations of Mrs. Stowe, the sick vacuities of *The Rover Boys*. Finally, the aim of the protest novel becomes something very closely resembling the zeal of those alabaster missionaries to Africa to cover the nakedness of the natives, to hurry them into the pallid arms of Jesus and thence into slavery. The aim has now become to reduce all Americans to the compulsive, bloodless dimensions of a guy named Joe.

It is the peculiar triumph of society—and its loss—that it is able to convince those people to whom it has given inferior status of the reality of this decree; it has the force and the weapons to translate its dictum into fact, so that the allegedly inferior are actually made so, insofar as the societal realities are concerned. This is a more hidden phenomenon now than it was in the days of serfdom, but it is no less implacable. Now, as then, we find ourselves bound, first without, then within, by the nature of our categorization. And escape is not effected through a bitter railing against this trap; it is as though this very striving were the only motion needed to spring the trap upon us. We take our shape, it is true, within and against that cage of reality bequeathed us at our birth; and yet it is precisely through our dependence on this reality that we are most endlessly betrayed. Society is held together by our need; we bind it together with legend, myth, coercion, fearing that without it we will be hurled into that void, within which, like the earth before the Word was spoken, the foundations of society are hidden. From this void—ourselves—it is the function of society to protect us; but it is only this void, our unknown selves, demanding, forever, a new act of creation, which can save us—"from the evil that is in the world." With the same motion, at the same time, it is this toward which we endlessly struggle and from which, endlessly, we struggle to escape.

It must be remembered that the oppressed and the oppressor are bound together within the same society; they accept the same criteria, they share the same beliefs, they both alike depend on the same reality. Within this cage it is romantic, more, meaningless, to speak of a "new" society as the desire of the oppressed, for that shivering dependence on the props of reality which he shares with the *Herrenvolk* makes a truly "new" society impossible to conceive. What is meant by a new society is one in which inequalities will disappear, in which vengeance will be exacted; either there will be no oppressed at all, or the oppressed and the oppressor will change places. But, finally, as it seems to me, what the rejected desire is, is an elevation of status, acceptance within the present community. Thus, the African, exile, pagan, hurried off the auction block and into the fields, fell on his knees before that God in Whom he must now believe; who had made him, but not in His image. This tableau, this impossibility, is the heritage of the Negro in America: *Wash me, cried the slave to his Maker, and I shall be whiter, whiter than snow!* For black is the color of evil; only the robes of the saved are white. It is this cry, implacable on the air and in the skull, that he must live with. Beneath the widely published catalogue of brutality—bringing to mind, somehow, an image, a memory of church-bells burdening the air—is this reality which, in the same nightmare notion, he both flees and rushes to embrace. In America, now, this country devoted to the death of the paradox—which may, therefore, be put to death by one—his lot is as ambiguous as a tableau by Kafka. To flee or not, to move or not, it is all the same; his doom is written on his forehead, it is carried in his heart. In *Native Son*, Bigger Thomas stands on a Chicago street corner watching airplanes flown by white men racing against the sun and "God-damn" he says, the bitterness bubbling up like blood, remembering a million indignities, the terrible, rat-infested house, the humiliation of home-relief, the intense, aimless, ugly bickering, hating it; hatred smoulders through these pages like sulphur fire. All of Bigger's life is controlled, defined by his hatred and his fear. And later, his fear drives him to murder and his hatred to rape; he dies, having come, through this violence, we are told, for the first time, to a kind of life, having for the first time redeemed his manhood. Below the surface of this novel there lies, as it seems to me, a continuation, a complement of that monstrous legend it was written to destroy. Bigger is Uncle Tom's descendant, flesh of his flesh, so exactly opposite a portrait that, when the books are placed together, it seems that the contemporary Negro novelist and the dead New England woman are locked together in a deadly, timeless battle; the one uttering merciless exhortations, the other shouting curses. And, indeed, within this web of lust and fury, black and white can only thrust and counter-thrust, long for each other's slow, exquisite death; death by torture, acid, knives and burning; the thrust, the counter-thrust, the longing making the heavier that cloud which blinds and suffocates them both, so that they go down into the pit together. Thus has the cage betrayed us all, this moment, our life, turned to nothing through our terrible attempts to insure it. For Bigger's tragedy is not that he is cold or black or hungry, not even that he is American, black; but that he has accepted a theology that denies him life, that he admits the possibility of his being sub-human and feels constrained, therefore, to battle for his humanity according to those brutal criteria bequeathed him at his birth. But our humanity is our burden, our life; we need not battle for it; we need only to do what is infinitely more difficult—that is, accept it. The failure of the protest novel lies in its rejection of life, the human being, the denial of his beauty, dread, power, in its insistence that it is his categorization alone which is real and which cannot be transcended.

SELECTIONS FROM LESLIE FIEDLER
THE INADVERTANT EPIC

pp. 13-16, 83-84

***Uncle Tom's Cabin*: The Invisible Masterpiece**

Of all American novels, surely the most widely read and deeply loved–not just in the country of its origin, but throughout the world–is *Uncle Tom's Cabin.* Yet most elitist critics have found it an artistic failure, ill-constructed, shamefully sentimental and annoyingly shrill, its characters stereotypes, its plot vulgar melodrama. . . . So I felt myself to be engaging in a task nearly heroic, certainly unprecedented, when in *Love and Death [in the American Novel]* I tried to reconstruct *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (a book which, after all, I have read ten or twelve times, never without tears, since acquiring my first copy at age seven) sympathetically and in detail. Finally, however, influenced by Matthiessen and Lawrence, I undercut my praise . . .

I went on, moreover, to accuse [Stowe] of being even less capable of "radical Protest"; since I had just read James Baldwin's essay "Everybody's Protest Novel," . . . Yet Baldwin confesses elsewhere that Mrs. Stowe's novel had been one of his favorite boyhood books–describing how he simultaneously tended his younger brothers and sisters and redreamed her "excessive and spurious" dream of black martyrdom. "As they were born," he tell us, "I took them over with one hand and held a book in the other . . . and in this way I read *Uncle Tom's Cabin* . . . over and over and over again." . . .

Measured by the standards of high literature, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is a failure; of this there seems to me still no doubt; and in 1960 I could find no way out short of rejecting that book. But in the nearly two decades since, I have begun to reverse the process which led me into the trap, by measuring my inherited notions of appropriate criteria for literature against *Uncle Tom's Cabin,* instead of it against them. . . .

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I have determined, therefore, to deal head on with what I can only hypocritically disavow; and to save *Uncle Tom's Cabin*–even if this means re-defining literature as it has been traditionally understood[.]

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How pointless, then, the debate about . . . historical veracity . . . , except insofar as it reminds us that *all* contributions to our inadvertent prose epic have claimed to be more truth than fantasy–and were in that sense "hoaxes." Not just the works of Mrs. Stowe and Dixon, D.W. Griffin and Margaret Mitchell, but the Slave Narratives and White histories of Reconstruction on which they drew were, to one degree or another, fictional constructs.

The relation of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* to the Slave Narrative of Josiah Henson is especially interesting in this regard. . . . Only after she wrote her best-seller, did Mrs. Stowe discover it, citing it to prove to her pro-slavery opponents that Good Good Niggers did in fact exist. But Henson, it turns out, was not that good after all; and in any case his "true" account had been ghost-written by a White journalist, who was not above amending it in later editions to make it conform even more closely to Mrs. Stowe's novel. Henson himself, though cagey at first, ended by claiming, perhaps even believing, that he was the original authentic Uncle Tom. And Mrs. Stowe came to believe it, too, collaborating with Henson in inventing a meeting between them which seems never to have occurred. The surfiction or meta-myth which they thus created has ever since been exploited for the benefit of American tourists by the Chamber of Commerce of the small Ontario town in which Henson died, even as the airline which organizes tours to Gambia exploits Haley's mytho-history of his family.

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To impart wisdom or to make elegant structures, to console and uplift the heart are optional for song and story–not forbidden, but not required either. What is required is to stir wonder and ecstacy, thus enabling us to be "in dreams awake." Once we have realized this, we will have begun to define a new way of evaluating such long-underesteemed writers as Stowe and Mitchell and Dixon and Haley, inept in form and weak in ideas, but like Shakespeare or Sophocles, Dickens or Mark Twain, endowed–by the grace of God, the muse of their own unconscious–with mythopoetic power.

SELECTIONS FROM *PATRIOTIC GORE, STUDIES IN THE LITERATURE OF THE AMERICAN CIVIL WAR*

by Edmund Wilson

p. 4, 5, 6, 9, 10, 11.

. . . If we come to *Uncle Tom* for the first time today, we are likely to be surprised at not finding it what we imagined it and to conclude that the post-war neglect of it has been due to the strained situation between the North and South . . . It was still possible at the beginning of this century for a South Carolina teacher to make his pupils hold up their right hands and swear that they would never read *Uncle Tom.* Both sides, after the terrible years of the war, were glad to disregard the famous novel. The characters did still remain bywords, but they were mostly kept alive by the dramatizations, in which Mrs. Stowe had had no hand and which had exploited its most obviously comic and its more melodramatic elements. These versions for the stage kept at first relatively close to the novel, but in the course of half a century they grotesquely departed from it. . . .

To expose oneself in maturity to *Uncle Tom* may therefore prove a startling experience. It is a much more impressive work than one has ever been allowed to suspect. The first thing that strikes one about it is a certain eruptive force . . . Out of a background of undistinguished narrative, inelegantly and carelessly written, the characters leap into being with a vitality that is all the more striking for the ineptitude of the prose that presents them. These characters–like those of Dickens, at least in his early phase–express themselves a good deal better than the author expresses herself. The Shelbys and George Harris and Eliza and Aunt Chloe and Uncle Tom project themselves out of the void. They come before us arguing and struggling, like real people who cannot be quiet. We feel that the dams of discretion of which Mrs. Stowe has spoken have been burst by a passionate force that, compressed, has been mounting behind them, and which, liberated, has taken the form of a flock of lamenting and ranting, prattling and preaching characters, in a drama that demands to be played to the end.

. . . What is most unexpected is that, the farther one reads in *Uncle Tom,* the more one becomes aware that a critical mind is at work, which has the complex situation in a very firm grip and which, no matter how vehement the characters become, is controlling and coordinating their interrelations. Though there is much that is exciting in *Uncle Tom's Cabin,* it is never the crude melodrama of the decadent phase of the play; and though we find some old-fashioned moralizing and a couple of Dickensian deathbeds, there is a good deal less sentimentality than we may have been prepared for by our memories of the once celebrated stage apothesosis–if we are old enough to have seen it: "Little Eva in the Realms of Gold." We may even be surprised to discover that the novel is by no means an indictment drawn up by New England against the South. Mrs. Stowe has, on the contrary, been careful to contrive her story in such a way that the Southern states and New England shall be shown as involved to an equal degree in the kidnapping into slavery of the Negroes and the subsequent maltreatment of them, and that the emphasis shall all be laid

on the impracticability of slavery as a permanent institution.

. . . One of the strongest things in the novel is the role played by Uncle Tom–another value that was debased in the play. The Quakers who shelter Eliza are, of course, presented as Christians; but not one of the other white groups that figure in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is living in accordance with the principles of the religion they all profess. It is only the black Uncle Tom who has taken the white man's religion seriously and who–standing up bravely, in the final scene, for the dignity of his own soul but at the same time pardoning Simon Legree–attempts to live up to it literally. The sharp irony as well as the pathos is that the recompense he wins from the Christians, as he is gradually put through their mill, is to be separated from his family and exiled; tormented, imprisoned and done to death.

Another feature of the stage melodrama that is misleading in regard to the novel is the unity, or effect of unity, imposed on its locale and chronology. The play is made to center on New Orleans, and one sensational scene is made to follow another so fast that we do not have any idea of the actual passage of time. The two distinct strands of the story have, furthermore, to be tied up together in a way that they are not in the book. The novel has a quite different pattern, for in it the Negro characters–Uncle Tom and his family, on the one hand, George Harris and Eliza, on the other–are involved in a series of wanderings which progressively and excitingly reveal, like the visits of Chichikov in Gogol's *Dead Souls,* the traits of a whole society . . . Even Henry James, that expert professional, is obliged to pay her his tribute when he tell us, in *A Small Boy and Others,* of a performance of the play that had been for him in childhood a thrilling "aesthetic adventure," which had first, he says, awakened his critical sense, and admits that the novel constitutes a perhaps unique literary case of a book which has made its impression without the author's ever having concerned herself with literary problems at all, "as if," as he says, "a fish, a wonderful 'leaping' fish, had simply flown through the air."

OUR VIDEOTAPE: THE INNER EYE, THE PERFORMED SCENE, THE TV SCREEN

Samuel Taylor Coleridge identifies the ideal audience's state of mind in a happy phrase, "the willing suspension of disbelief," which describes loosely what spectators should bring to a stage performance. This mental state allows the audience to enter, say, into Eliza's state of mind as, putting her trust in heaven, she jumps from one ice floe to another carrying her baby in her arms. The viewer who is thinking "Look at those dumb soap boxes," or "What a hammy show!" or "How did they train those dogs to jump at her throat?" has not been able to suspend disbelief, and has lost a good part of the pleasure of this mimetic art's ability to put us mentally into another's shoes in a vivid and immediate way.

To empathize with the characters of the play, to fully imagine and vividly live through their experiences, however, requires not only an active imagination, skillful reading, a talented inner ear and an unerring sense of how the characters should look, sound and move about on stage, it requires the complete concentration and heightened emotional force which people experience in a full house when everyone else's attention is similarly focused on the stage. Difficult to achieve at any time, this state has become all but unattainable for the armchair play reader who is now accustomed to getting drama from the TV screen or, with a lucky environment, from live theater itself.

The best way to appreciate Aiken's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is to read it first, trying to visualize the characters and putting on a production, so to speak, inside one's head. Then, armed with this private vision, one should see our videotape version. Last, one should enact at least one of the scenes in any convenient space, providing a sympathetic audience is available–a classroom will certainly do.

We do believe that seeing our videotape will give you a better idea of the play's effect than simply reading it, although you will undoubtedly prefer your imagined Legree, say, to ours. However, we do not suggest that the tape will substitute for a live performance. Indeed, we left out the scene between George and Mr. Wilson, thinking it one of the easiest and most fun for students to do. Try carrying it to George's escape from the slavers, as Phineas holds them off beneath the trap door. Try the scene in several ways, with Mr. Wilson being more or less sympathetic to George, with the slavers more comic than frightening and vice versa. But always remember that the essence of live theater is provided by the audience, hanging on every word, hoping that George and Phineas will make it, silently cheering the heroes on.

Putting the play on videotape required a multitude of hard choices, especially because the play had to be condensed to fit into one classroom hour, and historical accuracy (Eliza crossing on soap boxes) had to be balanced with a regard for a current audience's difficulty in suspending disbelief in the face of an action accepted as "real" by convention only. We departed from strict fidelity to historical reproduction in other ways as well. For example, we used black actors for the black roles. They would have been done by white actors in black face in 1852. Black actors didn't get to do Uncle Tom, it seems, until about the 1880's. George, Eliza, Harry and Cassy would have been played by whites looking white, with no attempt to suggest that they were mulattoes. Uncle Tom was usually made up to look very old, to increase the pathos. (We stayed closer to the novel's description. After all, Chloe and he have young children.)

We deliberately altered the order of some lines, to compensate for the cutting, and added the phrase "taken my cornstarch and powdered herself" to Ophelia's litany of Topsy's wrongs, knowing that this slight variant, which came from later adaptations, was used in performance. (We have the poster which shows it.) We ask you to consider what that small change in the text does to your reaction to Topsy as a character. For that matter, what effects have all our changes had?

Our use of the 19th century illustrations, billboard posters and lithographs are intended to give you, again, a sense of time, place and atmosphere, while suggesting settings and moments which our studio budget did not allow us to simulate (such as Tom's rescue of Eva from the water, or Eliza's desperate voyage with the dogs closing in for the kill). Using stills for Tom's beating is one solution to the problem of making this incident meaningful while avoiding the melodrama which might cause a modern audience to laugh it off rather than be absorbed by it.

Our actors entered into the spirit of the work, Eva suggesting that she hold her breath in the dying scene, so as not to disturb the audience's willing suspension of disbelief by betraying that she still lives! It was Tom who told us that Uncle Tom would surely be young again in heaven, and requested permission to make him so. Legree, whose throat was constricted during the entire taping by the effort it was costing him to be such a villain, gave his own copy of the Bible to another member of the cast, saying that he had suddenly felt he had been directed to give it to her. Everyone gave more to the production than any payscale could have merited.

But in the course of doing so, we got back as much or more than we had given. I strongly suggest that you, too, enact some scenes from this play. Only then will you make it truly your own.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

Literary Considerations

1. Do you agree with Elizabeth Ammons' characterization of Tom as "odd"?
2. Discuss this question by Daniel Gerould "Which set of beliefs will overcome evil: Tom's defense of faith in the Lord through self-sacrifice, or George's black-nationalist trust in his pistol and good aim?"
3. Compare Aiken's play to Stowe's novel. How does the necessity to compress the novel into a play alter the work's themes, characterization, and portrayal of American life and slavery?
4. Discuss the characterizations of black characters contrasing a) Eliza and George, b) Tom, c) Topsy, d) Cassie, e) Sambo.
5. After reading Errol Hill's article, reevaluate the racism of the play.
6. Birdoff's book is full of anecdotes which illustrate the audience's willingness to accept the fictional world of the play. To what extent and in what respect does that audience willingness exist today?
7. Discuss how the need to make money affected *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in its early days. TV today?
8. Discuss the role of humor in the complete Aiken version of the play.
9. Discuss the role of a) sentiment and b) melodrama in the play.
10. Discuss the efficacy of the play as a propaganda piece.
11. Discuss the justice of Furnas' criticism of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* reprinted in this book.

The Videotape

12. Discuss how the characters as presented in the VTR differed from your conception of them.
13. Discuss our changes in the original Aiken version a) adding Topsy's powdering and b) using black actors for black parts.
14. What changed in your response to the text as a result of your seeing our videotape?
15. We suggest that you act out the George–Mr. Wilson scene from the play. Can you guess why we omitted it from our VTR?
16. In the novel, Uncle Tom is a young man. On the stage he was usually played in his sixties. How do you think your reponse was affected by our using a younger actor?
17. How would your response have differed if we used white actors for Eliza, George, and Cassie? Whites in blackface for Tom, Topsy and Sambo?
18. Our doubling (and tripling) were in the tradition of the play. How did that affect your response?
19. Read William Wells Brown's *The Escape or A Leap for Freedom* (reprinted in James Hatch & Ted Shine, *Black Theatre: USA* and compare it to the play of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in regard to its portrayal of: slavery, black straight and comic characters, white slaveowners, its reception by audiences when recited by its author.
20. Read Harriet Beecher Stowe's dramatization of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* called *A Christian Slave* (Difficult to obtain, this is a rare book, not included in the standard edition of Stowe's Complete Works). Compare it to Aiken's adaptation.

Social Studies Topics for Discussion and Projects:*

1. Research and report on the lives of these famous people:

Nat Turner	Levi Coffin
Solomon Northrup	John C. Calhoun
Harriet Tubman	Eli Whitney
William Lloyd Garrison	Rev. John Rankin
Harriet Beecher Stowe	Elizabeth Stanton
Susan B. Anthony	Stephen Foster
Phillis Wheatley	Edwin Booth
Grimke sisters	David Belasco
Elijah Lovejoy	Joseph Jefferson, III

2. Assign research projects on the following:
   - Abolitionists
   - Black Codes
   - Fugitive Slave Acts (1850)
   - Missouri Compromise
   - American Minstrels
   - *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (and its effects)
   - The Cotton Gin and Slavery
   - Slavery in the U.S.
   - Underground Railroad
   - Melodrama in the American theatre
3. Discuss the origins and changing meanings of the terms "an Uncle Tom" and "a real Simon Legree!"
4. Discuss why Lincoln said, "So this is the little lady who started the big war!" when he met Harriet Beecher Stowe.
5. Make a time line tracing the history of slavery in the United States.
6. Make one of the the following maps: a) A map showing the states that had abolished slavery by 1860 and those that still maintained it; b) A map showing the main routes and famous stations of the Underground Railroad in the United States prior to the Civil War.
7. Keep a one-week diary as:
   - a Southern slaveowner
   - an Abolitionist
   - a slave escaping on the Underground Railroad
   - a slave on the Louisiana plantation
   - a slave woman
   - a slave child
   - a visitor to a slave quarters on a plantation
   - the daughter of a slave owner/plantation owner
   - Harriet Beecher Stowe in the 1850's
   - an actor in any period of American history
8. Read the autobiographies of Frederick Douglass or Josiah Henson.
9. Read and report on accounts by freed and escaped slaves.
10. Read and report on accounts by American actors of their lives in the theatre.

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Museum of the City of New York, Theatre Collection, Brady Collection, auction scene.

Oxford University Press for Wilson, *Patriotic Gore*

From *Notes of a Native Son* by James Baldwin. Copyright © 1955 by James Baldwin. Used by permission of Beacon Press, Boston.

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NOTES

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[1]Richard Moody, *Dramas from the American Theatre: 1762-1909* (Boston, 1966), p. 350.

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[12]Earnest, pp. 140-1; Leslie Smith, "Through Rose-Colored Glasses: Some American Victorian Sentimental Novels," in *New Dimensions in Popular Culture*, ed. Russel B. Nye (Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1972), pp. 104-106; Delwyn L. Sneller, "The Character and Function of Popular Religious Poetry 1820-1860," in Nye, pp. 172-188. The archetypal stature of Little Eva as the Pure Young Thing and the Muse of Death is provocatively analyzed by Leslie A. Fiedler in *Love and Death in the American Novel*, Rev. ed. (N.Y.: Stein and Day, 1966), pp. 264-9.

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[2]Charles Edward Stowe, *Life*, pp. 149, 198.

[3]For full discussion of this idea see my longer essay "Heroines in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*," in *Critical Essays on Harriet Beecher Stowe*, ed. Elizabeth Ammons (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1980), pp. 152-65.

[4]On other Beechers' attitudes toward Abolition, as well as an interesting discussion of Stowe's later career, see Laurie Crumpacker, "Four Novels of Harriet Beecher Stowe: A Study in Nineteenth-Century Androgyny" in *American Novelists Revisited: Essays in Feminist Criticism*, ed. Fritz Fleischmann (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1982), pp. 78-106.

[5]See Nina Baym, *Women's Fiction; A Guide to Novels By and About Women, 1820-1870* (Ithaca; Cornell University Press, 1978).

[6]Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin; or, Life Among the Lowly* (Boston: J.P. Jewett and Co., 1852). References in the text to the novel are to this edition.

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[2]See Jane P. Tompkins, "Sentimental Power: *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and the Politics of Literary History," Glyph 9 , pp. 79-102 for an interesting reconsideration of the role of sentiment.

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An Historical Perspective: Polatnick

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[2]Johnston, p. 225.
[3]Mott, p. 117.
[4]Lader, p. 169.
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[7]Brooks, p. 420.
[8]Lader, p. 169.
[9]Mott, p. 118.
[10]Brooks, p. 420.
[11]*Ibid.*
[12]Mott, p. 118.
[13]Wilson, E., p. 8.
[14]Lader p. 170.
[15]Johnston, p. 271.
[16]*Ibid.*, p. 356.
[17]*Ibid.*, p. 358.
[18]Lader, pp. 14-5.
[19]Furnas, p. 24, footnote.
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The Program for Culture at Play: Multimedia Studies in American Drama is sponsored by the National Endowment for the Humanities. We are issuing a series of studies of unjustly neglected American plays. Along with this handbook, we have produced a videotape version of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* condensed for classroom use. Performing Arts Journal Publications has issued a new text of Aiken's play in the volume, *American Melodrama* (1983). VTR's and handbooks can be ordered through Brooklyn College, Bedford Avenue and Avenue H, Brooklyn, New York, 11210, texts through Performing Arts Journal Publications, 325 Spring Street, New York City.

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SEND ORDERS TO:

Professor Vera Jiji
Multimedia Studies in American Drama
Brooklyn College
Bedford Avenue and Avenue H
Brooklyn, N.Y. 11210

STOWAGE OF THE BRITISH SLAVE SHIP BROOKES UNDER THE REGULATED SLAVE TRADE

Act of 1788

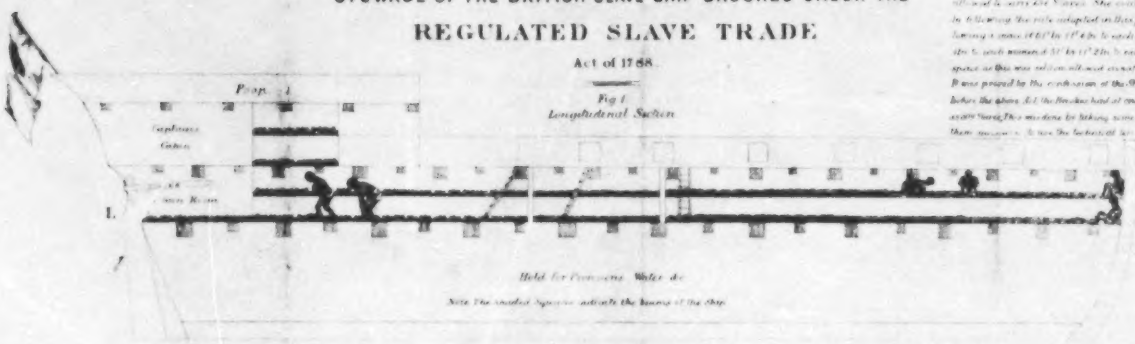

Fig 1
Longitudinal Section

PLAN OF LOWER DECK WITH THE STOWAGE OF 292 SLAVES

130 OF THESE BEING STOWED UNDER THE SHELVES AS SHEWN IN FIGURE 3 & FIGURE 3.

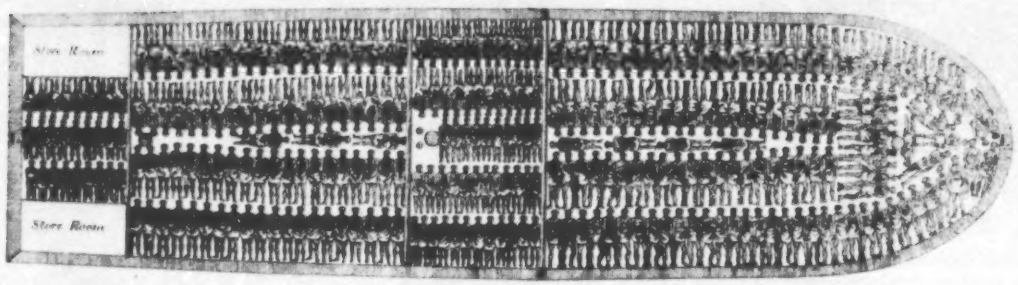

Fig 2

PLAN SHEWING THE STOWAGE OF 130 ADDITIONAL SLAVES ROUND THE WINGS OR SIDES OF THE LOWER DECK BY MEANS OF PLATFORMS OR SHELVES IN THE MANNER OF GALLERIES IN A CHURCH. THE SLAVES STOWED ON THE SHELVES AND BELOW THEM HAVE ONLY A HEIGHT OF 2 FEET 7 INCHES BETWEEN THE BEAMS AND FAR LESS UNDER THE BEAMS. (See Fig 1)

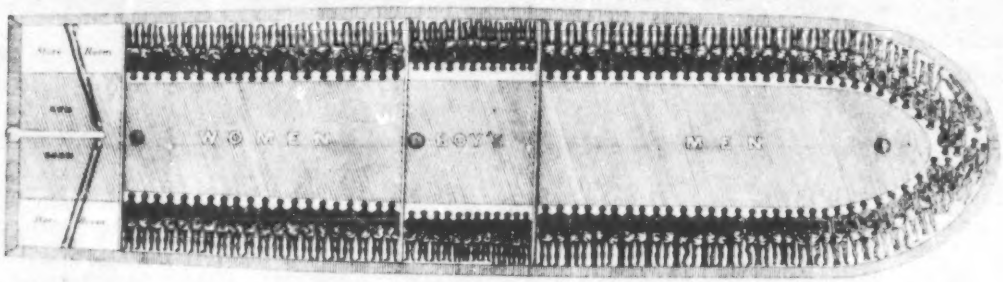

Fig 3

Fig 4
Cross Section at the Poop

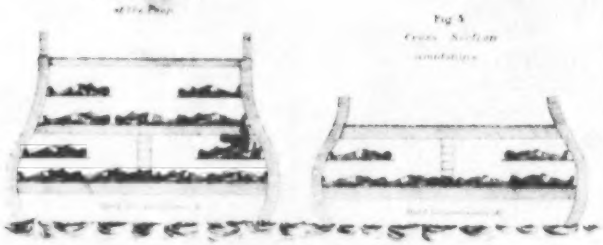

Fig 5
Cross Section amidships

Fig 6
Lower tier of Slaves under the Poop